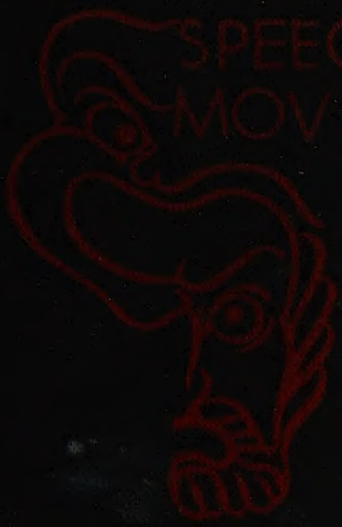

SPEECH AND MOVEMENT ON THE STAGE

KATE EMIL BEHNKE

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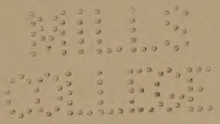
SPEECH AND MOVEMENT ON THE STAGE

By KATE EMIL-BEHNKE

Author of SINGERS' DIFFICULTIES, THE SPEAKING VOICE (*revised edition*), STAMMERING (*revised edition*)



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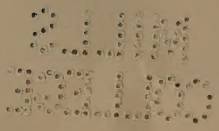

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TO

MY FRIENDS

OF THE

THEATRE WORLD

'CLEAR *and accurate pronunciation is evidence of firm, decisive action and character; like a firm habit of walking. He who drags and shuffles and stutters with his feet is liable to drag, shuffle, and stutter with his tongue—and with his mind, his will, and his conduct;* and vice versa. *If you wish to stand squarely and move surely among your friends, your duties, and your thoughts, begin with your pronunciation.*'—

H. R. SHIPHERD,

Manual and Models for College Composition.

FOREWORD

THERE exists an hilarious cartoon by Max Beerbohm called *The Invalid*. The Theatre, a lugubrious feminine figure, lies sick abed. Her doctors, drawn with the faces of the principal critics and dramatists of the day, are grouped about her in anxious consultation, while she yields her wrist to one of them and shows him her tongue.

Now, is it a happy accident that the English Theatre, languid, should be showing the doctors her poor tongue, or is it in fact a pretty broad hint that her ailment is neither rickets, growing pains, plague or the palsy, but merely a malady of speech? One is always being told that the Theatre is on her last legs, and yet those last legs never fail her. She may not flourish but she does survive, and so one argues that the malady is not dangerous. Whatever it is, it is not incurable. And year by year the doctors gather together, exactly as Mr. Beerbohm draws them, and, year by year, it is noticeable that they are in closer agreement as to the cause of the Theatre's disease. They agree that the Theatre, who, in her great days, was the humble servant of the Ear and the Eye, pays too much respect to the Eye nowadays, though the Eye's proper servant is the Cinema: and forgets, to her own loss, the just claims upon her of the Ear.

Everybody knows this, to judge by their complaints. The public complains that it can't hear: the poets complain that they are not spoken properly: the masters of prose are evolving, in despair, a dialogue of shrugs and blanks: the Shakespearians complain that their meat is cut up small for

them: and one well-known playwright critic conducts, year in, year out, a furious campaign against the wasp-waisting of vowels and the tight shoes of modern English consonants.

Everybody, we say, knows what is wrong with the English Theatre.

But, after all, when we say 'everybody' we really mean the people whose lives are spent round and about the Theatre, and we are thinking of the books they write and the opinions they express in them of what is really their own craft. It is a novelty to open a book which lightly surveys the history of English acting, assembles the considered opinions of the experts, does not view the Theatre as a critic, a playwright, player, producer or theatre-goer, and yet writes of the Theatre from the craftsman's point of view.

But here is just such a book. Its author is a voice-maker. But in this book the author does not explain her method: that she dealt with in *The Speaking Voice* and *Singers' Difficulties* much as her father dealt in an earlier day in his own treatises on the system of voice-training which he inaugurated and which she has since developed. Instead, she discusses the Theatre as a whole from the point of view of a tool-maker: and it is just this point of view, it seems to me, which actor, critic, play-maker, and public will all find peculiarly interesting; for a workman is helpless without his tools, and the body and voice are the tools of the actor.

But a writer of Introductions has always to remember two mottoes—'Good wine needs no bush' and 'A good reader needs no nudge'. A reader will be interested if he chooses, and bored if he chooses: and if he is a wise reader he will skip

the Introduction and judge for himself. Yet, skipping or no skipping, I confess that I have found a wilful pleasure in writing this brief note of appreciation. For I have known the author's work for years, and it has always fascinated me. I have seen her work on stammerers, drawlers, squeakers, and squealers: I have seen her turn little voices into big ones and thin voices into round ones: I have seen her rub out an accent as you rub out a pencil mark with india-rubber. That is to say, I have seen her at her own job of making the tools for the player to use, and because I have seen it I study her book. For here is not only a craftswoman discussing the tools of her trade but a tool-maker discussing the trade for which she makes tools.

Now there is a point of view that is intriguing!

CLEMENCE DANE.

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The Author's thanks are due to Mr. J. H. Leigh for kind permission to photograph the engravings of Garrick, Kemble, and Irving.

The photographs were taken by Messrs. Greville of Marlow.

CHAPTER ONE

PAST AND PRESENT ACTING

THE old playgoer, or the student of dramatic history, invariably asserts that the acting of the present day is inferior to that of the past. The old playgoer asks what we have to-day to compare with the art, power, and magnetism of Irving, Ellen Terry, Vezin, the Kendals, the Bancrofts, Wyndham, or Tree. The student of dramatic history is sure that great acting ended with the retirement in 1851 of Macready, and that we have no conception of what heights were reached by Richard Burbage, John Henderson, David Garrick, Peg Woffington, Mrs. Siddons, Edmund Kean, or Macready.

Who knows? The art of the actor is evanescent. He expresses himself in no concrete medium. He leaves no canvas, no sculpture, no book, no tangible record. Even if an actor writes about his art, his method, his training—valuable as this may be as a signpost to those desirous of following the same road—he cannot by the most vivid description reconstruct for us the magic of his performance. He cannot awake the thrill that passes to us from him by an invisible bridge. He cannot in cold print move us to tears or laughter, rouse us to heights, plunge us into depths, make us forget our worries, depression, sorrow, as he does by the medium of his personality expressed in the art of acting.

A wonderful art must this be that, with nothing of tangible record, invests the names of great actors with a glamour that endures, that after generations have come and gone

the leaves are still green in their chaplet of laurel. Read the accounts of the great actors of the past and you will be strangely stirred and moved by them. They tell of dazzling, soul-rending, stupendous performances, achieved for the most part after incredible toil, hardship and privation, starvation even. They describe frenzied enthusiasm and emotion such as we must admit have no place in our theatres to-day. It is related of Edmund Kean (1787–1833) that his energy was so terrible, his acting so magnificent, that whirlwinds of applause would shake the house. In 'Zanga' the expression of his features was so terrible, so appalling, that Southey exclaimed: 'He looks like Michael Angelo's rebellious Archangel.' When he played 'Sir Giles Overreach' ladies were carried out in screaming hysterics, Byron fell into a convulsive fit, and Mrs. Glover (1779–1850), herself an actress of repute, fainted. Byron wrote of his 'Richard' that 'it was life, nature, truth, without exaggeration or diminution'. And of his 'Iago': 'Was it not perfection? I was close to him (in the orchestra) and never saw an English countenance half so expressive.' He played 'Othello' and 'Iago' alternately, and Dr. Doran said of his 'Othello': 'In the fiercer scenes he was unsurpassable, and in the great third act none who remember him will be prepared to allow that he ever had, or is likely to have, an equal.'

A critic in *The Times* wrote: 'We can recollect no instance of an actor who could stand silently on the stage for minutes together, and, by calling up in succession all the shades and degrees of passion into his countenance, move his audience to silence and tears of true sympathy.'

At his farewell performance in 1830 the crush at the doors was so terrible that even strong men could not endure the

pressure and fought to be released. Women fainted and could not be dragged out, and many were seriously injured.

When R. W. Elliston appeared at the King's Theatre in 1803 the crowd was so great that they broke down the doors and 'rushed' the house.

As to Mrs. Siddons (1755–1831), the scenes she aroused by her acting were terrible in their intensity. It was of common occurrence that she reduced men to tears and women to hysterics. Hazlitt, writing of her farewell, said: 'The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander.'

And what a glamour still invests her name! What it stands for to us who never saw her, nor even heard spoken of by those who had seen her! What magic must there be in this art of the actor that it should be written of her to-day who lived so long ago:

'Her haunting whisper in the sleep-walking scene still echoes to us from the eighteenth century! Something of the mystery of horror and terror which she brought with her still touches us with its chill breath. Behind every Lady Macbeth we seem to see her beautiful and terrible ghost, and somehow feel that hers is the inspiration behind every individual performance. Her art still lives, and every new production of the great play which was the crown of her fame is a dedication to her memory, one more laurel wreath laid on her grave. Triumphs of the theatre are too often writ in water, and the fame of an actress passes with her into the shade of a dead past. But with the Siddons the echo of that wonderful voice is still heard by us to-day.'—*The Sphere*, 8 January 1927.

Moreover, it was not that one great actor or actress was credited with genius by contrast with prevailing mediocrity. It was an era of dramatic genius, that produced many stars of real magnitude, often contemporaneously, whose performances were compared and hotly discussed. This was so, for example, with Mrs. Cibber (1715–65), Mrs. Pritchard (1711–68), and Mrs. Yates (1728–87). London went mad over their rival excellences. Dr. Johnson, Garrick, Walpole, Tate, Wilkinson, Dibdin, and many other authorities of the time argued their respective merits incessantly; but though they disputed, as experts always will, it was merely as to detail. Never was their genius in question.

Such was their power of attraction that though in many instances penniless to start with, often almost starving, without influence to help them, they made fortunes for themselves and for managements.

Drury Lane just before Kean's début was on the verge of bankruptcy. At the close of his first season there, he had played 'Shylock' fifteen times, 'Richard' twenty-five times, 'Hamlet' eight times, 'Othello' ten times, 'Iago' eight times, and 'Luke' in *Riches* four times. From these seventy nights the profits were seventy thousand pounds, and there had previously been a hundred and thirty-nine nights of continuous loss. Mark, this change from threatening bankruptcy to fortune owed nothing to mounting, dressing, or the like; it was solely due to the compelling genius of one actor.

The records of the past abound in such instances. Mrs. Cibber was a great 'draw'. When she first appeared in Ireland there was not ten pounds in the house, but she soon drew enormous crowds and was extremely profitable to the management. Peg Woffington (1720–60) filled theatre

coffers to overflowing. Whenever Miss O'Neill (1791–1872) appeared she was said to have earned not less than ten thousand pounds a year. Gold and jewels were showered like water on Mrs. Barry (1734–1801) at her benefit. Mrs. Barry, by the way, was the first performer to whom a benefit was given, in 1787. It was accorded her on account of her extraordinary abilities.

They were honoured alike in life and death, and in such a way as to testify their greatness to posterity. We cannot forget those who have a resting-place in Westminster Abbey, an evidence to all time of the power of that intangible thing, the art of the actor. Significant indeed is the fact of the burial of great women actresses of the past—Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Cibber in the Cloisters, Mrs. Pope in the Abbey, a monument to the memory of Mrs. Pritchard in Poet's Corner. Think what Nance Oldfield must have stood for in the life of the time that she should have been accorded a public lying-in-state in the Jerusalem Chamber! Multitudes flocked to it, and she was carried to her grave in the Cloisters of Westminster Abbey by Lord Hervey, Lord De La Warr, and Bubb Doddington (who afterwards became Lord Melcombe).

Her name is still a tradition on the stage; her memory remains green.

And here is another testimony of to-day to the immortality of the great actor and to the enduring magic of his art, which appeared in the *Sunday Times* of 4 April 1926:

'How many people treasure the memory of the beautiful and gracious Peg Woffington as if she were a personal friend? A letter from a correspondent proves that there are some who never forget her. He says: "As Easter Day falls this year on the day after the anniversary of the day of the burial of the

famous Margaret Woffington, will you kindly tell us something about her in your Easter message? It would be in keeping with the great message that day has for us all." And yet what could I say about her life and her personality which would be a finer tribute than the same reader himself pays? For he goes on to say: "Margaret Woffington was the acme of physical and mental beauty, the embodiment of natural grace and wholesome ambition, the apogee of true, loving generosity. Those beautiful bones have been lying in Teddington churchyard since April third 1760, yet to some living to-day she is still the young, beautiful, and witty actress, with a heart full of generous kindness. Can you explain this?" No: Reade, Molloy, and her other biographers had nothing to do with it. A radiant personality, indeed, when nearly a hundred and seventy years after her passing away men can think of her not as an historic figure but almost as a living, lovely woman.'

Does it not seem strange that after a century abounding with such dramatic genius, such superlative acting, the memory of which lives on, ever green, decay of the art should have set in? That this is so is indisputable, and is commented on by all writers on our dramatic history.

Henry Barton Baker in *Our Old Actors* says, for example: 'We can trace the decay of the art from the retirement of Garrick, great tragic actors becoming fewer and fewer'; and Cicely Hamilton in *The Old Vic*: 'English acting has never stood higher in achievement and in public esteem that it did at the beginning of the last century.' Errol Sherson in *London's Lost Theatres*, after stating that there is at the present time 'a dearth of really good acting', goes on:

'The most admired school of to-day is that of the so-called

"natural" school of acting, which may in time come to mean the school of those who don't attempt to act at all, but are clever at speaking the words of characters which one meets with in everyday life. If that be so there is no longer any hope for Shakespeare, or the costume drama, the personages in which certainly did not speak or act as we do.'

Komisarjevsky writes to the same effect in *Myself and the Theatre*. He says:

'There are actors on the stage to-day who, from fear of appearing "theatrical", try not to *act*. They think that to seem sincere and simple they should behave as they do in everyday life in every play in which they appear—since "no one can be natural unless *he is himself*". They exploit their own type, their mannerisms, and their particular form of attractiveness in every part they play, and are in fact little more than perambulating mannequins, who are quite content to speak the playwright's words without expressing their spirit. The majority of these "untheatrical" actors, however, cannot resist making use of theatrical tricks in order to mark their inability to *act* with simplicity and sincerity. . . . Modern "naturalistic" acting is to a great extent responsible for the fact that the majority of young actors and actresses to-day suffer from atrophied imagination, and neither know how to speak nor to move on the stage.'

What we have to ask ourselves is: Has dramatic genius died out, or do modern conditions prevent its expression? Or is there something radically amiss with our method of training? That the public does not want great acting, or would be unmoved by it, can be dismissed from consideration. Such an idea is entirely disposed of by the response to dramatic genius such as that of Duse. This was all the more remarkable, and the more complete a testimony to the

appreciation of great acting, because her performances were in Italian—a language probably not understood by more than a very small percentage of those who flocked to see her. Moreover, as Mr. Shaw pointed out: 'In her we necessarily had *the great school in its perfect integrity*, because Duse without her genius would have been a plain little woman of no use to any manager.'

If we study dramatic authorities of the present day we shall find a consensus of opinion that *prevailing methods* rather than decay or decline of the art itself must be held responsible. Mr. Granville Barker, for instance, in *The Exemplary Theatre*, says:

'The modern professional theatre does not ask for recruits deeply studied in the art of acting. It demands just so much of the external craft of the actor as will measure up to the critical discernment of its present public, which is in its turn —and therefore remains—rather low. The main accusation must be answered—and it is freely made—that the present lot of English-speaking actors do not know their business. They may have a more sympathetic understanding of the purpose of their work than their forbears of thirty years back would have shown, but their expression of it is fatally clogged by a voice they can't manage, a face that appears to need moving by hand, and a body they hardly dare move at all, unless with a violence which will mark its lack of all finer articulations. It is between these two stools, then—of a technique outworn and discarded, and an attempt to do without any technique at all—that the art of acting has now fallen. It has fallen into dulness, a quite unforgivable sin.'

Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, says: 'The smart nullity of the London person is becoming

intolerably tedious, and the exhaustion of the novelty of the plays constructed for him has stripped them of their illusion and left their jingling, rickety mechanism patent to a disgusted public.'

Then, discussing the amateur in art, he says:

'I have never, I hope, underrated the importance of the amateur; but I am now beginning to cling to him as the saviour of theatrical art. He alone among the younger generation seems to have any experience of acting. Nothing is more appalling to the dramatic author than the discovery that actors of ten years' standing have acquired nothing but a habit of brazening out their own incompetence. What is an actor nowadays, or an actress? In nine cases out of ten simply a person who has been on tour with half a dozen London successes playing parts that involve nothing but a little business thoughtlessly copied from the performances of their London creator; with long intervals spent between each tour in the ranks of unemployment. A decent amateur of two years' standing, and of the true irrepressible sort, will beat him hopelessly at his art.'

I need not multiply quotations. There is universal agreement amongst those qualified to judge. And while it may certainly be argued that the 'great manner' would be out of place in modern comedy, nevertheless technique of a high order is required to 'put across' its feathery lightness technique that can only be acquired by hard work. Those who fancy that nothing more is necessary than to walk on and 'not act', and speak as if in a drawing-room, will be ineffective and not heard.

Here we have one of the factors in that terrible modern custom of 'casting to type' which must inevitably destroy the art of acting if persisted in. If an actor's work be con-

fined always to the same type of part in light plays which are the mirror of his own times he will have no opportunity to develop the capacity that may be latent within him to play the classics or romantic drama, and his work will be merely impersonative instead of interpretative. As Mr. Granville Barker has said:

'It may be really asserted that most young playgoers of to-day do not know what acting is. They yield themselves happily to the emotional illusions of the play itself, but the stage attitudes they are accustomed to have about the relation to acting that an oleograph has to a Rembrandt. This alone should suffice to condemn the long-run system, for one cannot too often insist that the art of acting is the theatre's very flesh and blood.'

The view taken by some managers that an actor who has had Shakespearian experience is thereby unfitted for modern work is much to be deplored. Such an assumption strikes at the very foundation of dramatic art. We should never have had the great actors of the past had such an idea prevailed then. There is, however, some justification for this view; because, owing to the present method of classifying and labelling actors, those who are clearly unsuited to anything but modern work settle to it automatically and never attempt anything else. On the other hand, those who have a weightiness that unsuits them for modern plays take up Shakespeare, and if they attempt modern work they probably merit the well-known remark that 'Shakespeare has unfitted them for it'.

We cannot of course step outside certain definite physical characteristics and limitations, but a more catholic training and experience would narrow down these limitations, and would set free for us a much wider range of acting.

The opinion is very generally held that if we could see the great actors of the past now we should consider them inclined to 'mouth' and rave and rant. The rank and file may have done so, but according to writers of the time the leaders certainly did not. Mouthing and ranting were severely criticized, and it is abundantly clear that a high standard of voice-work must have existed from the earliest time when there is any record extant of the performances of these actors. We can go as far back as Richard Burbage, the first of the noble line of actors that ended with Macready. The date of his birth is unknown, but he held a prominent position prior to 1588. According to contemporary evidence he was 'a most consummate master of acting and of speech'. Flecknoe wrote, in *Discourses on the English Stage*:

'He was a delightful "Proteus", so wholly transforming himself into his part, and putting off himself with his clothes, as he never (not so much as in the tyring house) assumed himself again until the play was done. He had all the parts of an excellent actor, animating his words with speaking and speech with action, his auditors being never more delighted than when he spoke, nor more sorry than when he held his peace; yet even then he was an excellent actor still, never failing in his part when he had done speaking; but with his looks and gesture maintaining it still until the height.'

An elegy on his death in 1618 testified to the excellence of his voice-work:

> How did his speech become him and his pace
> Suit with his speech, and every action grace
> Them both alike, while not a word did fall
> Without just weight to ballast it withall.

That accomplished actor and admirable dramatic critic,

Colley Cibber, who died in 1757, at the age of eighty, overcame, by dint of hard work, incessant study, and excellent judgement, the lack of almost every theatrical requisite. He relates in his *Life* that he was snubbed in his desire as a young actor to play heroes by the insufficiency of his voice and by being an uninformed, meagre person, with a dismal, pale complexion.

His realization of the actor's need for control of voice is apparent in his definition of perfect acting. He said:

'The voice of a singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune than that of an actor in theatrical elocution; the least syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, depreciates it to nothing, while every syllable if rightly touched gives life and spirit to the whole.'

And again: 'But alas! to preserve this medium, between mouthing, and meaning too little, to keep the attention more pleasingly awake, by a temper'd spirit, than by mere vehemence of voice, is of all the master strokes of an actor the most difficult to reach.'

Defects of voice were sternly criticized. Boaden in his *Memoirs of the Kembles*, writing of Charles Young's début on 27 June 1807, said:

'The volume of the voice was great and of good tone, but the articulation was not nice, and he laboured under a lisp whenever the letter "s" occurred.'

Mrs. Pritchard's beautiful diction was only acquired after years of toil. In private life she was homely and her pronunciation open to reproach. So much so that Dr. Johnson, commenting on her mistakes, spoke of her as 'an inspired idiot'.

Colley Cibber, writing on Nance Oldfield, said: 'She had

been a year in the Theatre Royal before she was observed to give any tolerable hope of her being an actress, so unlike to all manner of propriety was her speaking.' And again: 'There was so little hopes of Mrs. Barry, at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first year, discharged from the company. . . The objection to Mrs. Barry at that time must have been a defective ear, or some unskilful dissonance in her manner of pronouncing.'

Cibber pointed out how difficult it is 'to judge with certainty from their first trials whether young people would ever make any great figure on a theatre', instancing the long and hard work before Mrs. Barry and Nance Oldfield overcame their defects. So was it with many others who achieved fame.

Mrs. Yates, for instance, had a poor voice, and in the early part of her career was said by all critics to be greatly in need of training in elocution. This she subsequently obtained and the improvement was at once noted.

'Her voice,' wrote a critic, 'cured of its tendency to feebleness, swept through every nook and cranny of the theatre, making the audience shiver and weep according to her will.'

Mrs. Abington's voice was harsh, and it was only by dint of incessant practice and attention that she overcame its deficiencies.

Again and again contemporary writers criticize anything in the nature of *forcing* the voice. It was written of Mrs. Hartley: 'There is not the least harmony in her voice, but when forced (which she never fails to do on every occasion) is loud and strong, but such an inarticulate gabble that you must be well acquainted with her part to understand it.'

Here, with criticism of voice, is a general analysis which shows what a high standard of performance obtained:

'When Miss Farren learns to tread the stage with more ease, to modulate and vary her voice, to correct in spirit and regulate her actions, and to give a proper utterance to her feelings by a suitable expression of voice and countenance, in our opinion she will be a most valuable acquisition to our London Theatre.'

The fact that very many of the old actors had first been trained as professional singers is of great significance. In any case, instruction in singing usually formed part of their training. It is no mere coincidence that many actors of the present time who are distinguished for their versatility, clearness of enunciation, 'carrying-power' and ability to sway their audiences with sureness of touch and economy of effort, have studied singing seriously at the outset of their careers, in some cases having first appeared as professional singers.

What this means to the actor will be appreciated when we consider the degree of breath-control, fineness of ear, vocal range, tone-colour, flexibility, and sustained tone required for singing; together with the high degree of clearness of enunciation which is necessary if the words are to be understood. For their acquirement, steady work, regular lessons and practice, must be carried out such as are seldom applied to the training of the speaking voice. The value of such training to public speakers is not realized as it should be.

I am constantly amazed when actors come to me for help in voice-production to find how frequently they are deficient in 'ear', and are unable to sing a note. Again and again I find inability to copy a sound either from voice or piano.

And the corollary of this deficiency of tonal perception is invariably a great difficulty in reproducing the inflections of the speaking voice, and usually also a lack of sense of rhythm.

The actor, in addition to the training of his speaking voice, should study singing, and should work at it systematically, putting in steady daily practice. Experience in musical pieces makes an excellent commencement of stage work. It was not for nothing that the old actors began their careers in operetta or vaudeville. Coming nearer to our own times it will be remembered that Irving, Wyndham, and Tree all appeared in burlesque before passing on to 'legitimate' acting. And that mistress of technique, Marie Tempest, graduated in musical plays.

When we examine the records of the past we find it the exception that actors had not studied singing seriously.

Kitty Clive (1711–85) trained first as a singer under Henry Carey, the composer of *Sally in our Alley*.

Peg Woffington (1720–60) was trained as a child to sing and dance, with a view to taking up acting as a profession. Her first part as a child was 'Polly' in a performance, entirely by children, of *The Beggar's Opera*, in which she made a great success.

Mrs. Cibber, sister of Dr. Arne, the composer, was trained by him for the operatic stage. But when her father-in-law, Colley Cibber, heard her recite a speaking part he was so astounded at her control, modulation, and beauty of tone, and the moving way in which she expressed the emotion of the character, that he advised her to abandon singing in favour of acting, and so gave the world one of its greatest actresses.

Mrs. Jordan (1762–1816), who supported her family from

the age of fourteen, sang enchantingly, and unaccompanied —which indicates a high degree of tonal certainty.

Edmund Kean sang constantly as a lad. He was an exquisite ballad singer, which besides beautiful tone connotes close study of the words, that faculty which made Sims Reeves so incomparable both on the operatic stage and on the concert platform.

Besides a serious study of singing the body was trained to a high degree of plasticity by fencing and dancing.

It is a mistake to suppose that the great actors of former days were spontaneous geniuses. They were examples of the truth that genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains.

Mrs. Pritchard's career affords striking proof of this. She was plain, painstaking, and persevering, and she worked her way to the top, to a pinnacle of fame and popularity, by sheer indomitable pluck and hard work. For a long while she did nothing more than walk on and play one-line parts and old women. Her climb to the heights of fame was very slow. Her chance came at last as 'Rosalind', after which it was impossible to keep her in the background any longer. She literally took London by storm.

Life for actors in those days was never-ending hard work. Rehearsals were incessant, for plays were only given a few times. The hours spent in the theatre were very long. Performances began early, and there were lengthy waits between the acts. For the most part their lives were one long apprenticeship to the stage. The majority commenced their professional career at an incredibly early age. Frequently they were the children of actors, or others connected with the stage, and so were born in its atmosphere and surroundings.

Mrs. Glover (1779–1850), daughter of Betterton the actor, was with her father on all his provincial tours for the first six years of her life, and she appeared on the stage as 'Cupid' literally as soon as she could walk.

Mrs. Bracegirdle, who died in 1748, appeared at the age of six.

Edmund Kean made his first appearance on the stage at the age of three. He was instructed as a child in Shakespeare. He was taught dancing by d'Egville, the ballet master, and fencing by Angelo. He was a match with the foils at a very early age for any one who entered the school. He ran away as a boy and wandered through the country with acrobats and tramps. He was often found when quite a child singing and reciting in public-houses, and he gave imitations of famous actors long before he reached his 'teens. He learnt all the great Shakespearian parts in childhood. At the age of ten he knew and acted 'Richard III', 'Speed the Plough', 'Hamlet', and 'Harlequin', and moved his auditors to wonder, admiration, and tears.

Miss O'Neill played from early childhood. Maria Foote (1798–1867) played 'Juliet' at the age of twelve, and at sixteen was engaged for Covent Garden. It is interesting to recall that she commenced to build a model theatre (which is now the Royalty) with the object of founding a dramatic school for young women.

Miss Kelly (1790–1882) played the 'Duke of York' in *Richard III* at Drury Lane at ten years of age.

Mrs. Siddons played 'Ariel' at twelve, when she had already been for some time on the stage.

John Philip Kemble (1757–1823) acted as a child of ten.

Miss Farren (1759–1829) acted from early childhood, and

played important parts in Liverpool when she was barely sixteen.

We find the same thing with actors nearer to our own time: Lady Bancroft, who acted from childhood; Kate Terry, who appeared at the age of eight, playing 'Cordelia' to Charles Kean's 'Lear' when she was only fourteen; Ellen Terry, at the age of six (there is a photograph to be seen of her in the Theatre Museum as 'Mamilius' at eight years of age); and Louis Calvert, who was a child of the stage.

It would be difficult to find a great actor of bygone days who did not start his career, and with serious training, in childhood, in many cases graduating in the Children's Companies, which were such a remarkable feature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Even before Elizabeth's reign the child actors of the Royal Chapel were the most distinctive feature of the Court stage, and in the first twenty-five years of her reign children were the chief purveyors of Court Drama. At one time they were serious rivals of adult companies, not confining themselves to a special kind of play but performing plays of all kinds. So potent a feature were they in the Drama of the time that they attracted the services of the most brilliant dramatists; indeed, Shakespeare is the only one of the great playwrights of that era who did not write for the Children's Companies.

Professor Ashley Thorndike tells us that the most distinctive group of dramatists that emerges from the Court records of the time was composed of the men in charge of the children of the Chapel Royal and other Companies of Children that performed before the Queen. These men were all musicians of considerable note and teachers of the boys, and also dramatic managers and authors.

Amongst these masters of Chapel schools were university men of distinction, one of whom, John Lyly, besides being an important dramatist and notable novelist, held a seat in Parliament. Another trainer, Nathaniel Gyles, sworn gentleman of the Chapel Royal and trainer of the children, was a musician who graduated from Magdalen College.

Elizabeth maintained the children of the Chapel School at her own expense with the avowed object of reforming the stage by fostering meritorious exclusiveness. Their primary function was to minister to His or Her Majesty's spiritual well-being by trained choral-singing at times of devotional service, but it was Elizabeth's declared purpose by means of these Children's Companies to reform abuses and to increase the usefulness of the stage, and by concentrating on the maintenance and training of the children to cut off the unworthy and raise the rest in moral tone. Consequently no expense and thought were spared to give them the best general education and to teach them not only all Grammar School subjects but also to give them training of a very high order from the best men of the day in singing, instrumental music, and play-acting.

A serious, fundamental, and extensive training in music was always one of the distinguishing features of the Children's Companies, requiring knowledge of the principal instruments of the time: organ, lute, bandora, mandolin, violin, bass viol, cello, flute, cornet. Their orchestras were of such high standard that it is stated that adult professional musicians paid for the privilege of performing in them. They sang so well that travellers coming from other countries said they had not heard their equal, and their singing-training covered choral, duet, quartette, and solo work—nothing perfunctory

or meretricious, like singing in unison, but bona fide musicians' training.

As with the voice so also with the body, which was brought to a high degree of flexibility, poise, and control by dancing and fencing. Their training in acting was remarkable in its character and range.

One half of the plays in this period of dramatic splendour in the reign of Elizabeth were *written for* and enacted by these Children's Companies. In the reign of James I the ratio was considerably higher. Women's parts were at that time performed by boys, and that the whole gamut of Shakespeare's heroines was played convincingly by them enables us to estimate the nature of their training and to appreciate it at its true worth. There is ample evidence that the plays performed by the Children's Companies did not differ materially from those given by the adult professional companies, excepting that more female characters were employed in them. This shows how the boys obtained the experience that enabled them later to play the women's parts in adult companies. In the years 1600–8, from the ages of thirteen to twenty, they acquired a very large range of difficult women's parts, including prostitutes, tragic wives, and faithless queens; and in 1608 Shakespeare's Company took over the leaders of this highly trained band of youngsters to play the Shakespearian heroines. At the same time Burbage took into the 'King's Company' some of the best of the boy actors, who from the age of twelve till long past middle age were playing women's parts, many of them having already been famous actors long before they left the Children's Companies. Undoubtedly these Children's Companies were the *schools* of the great tragedians and comedians of the

next generation. Boys who were at first employed in subordinate or in women's parts in the adult companies became later the leading actors and shareholders in the theatre. This meant, of course, that the youngsters were associated with the veterans and leading actors of the time, from whose experience they were enabled by their own strenuous early training to profit. Consequently there was no break in tradition, the significance of which will readily be appreciated.

Moreover, the methods established by the Children's Companies were carried on for some considerable time after they came to an end; indeed, till the close of the era of great acting.

Actors of established position would often 'discover' an embryo genius in some youngster and would undertake his or her tuition; and there would as a matter of course be instruction from experts in singing, fencing, and dancing. A start would then be made in a strolling company, after which the young actor passed into the York or Norwich Circuits. Five years in such a school usually educated the promising novice into a finished actor. Only then did he come to London, not in a new play, but in an old part with which he was thoroughly familiar, a part in which well-known actors before him had appeared, and by those merits he was judged. The old circuits have entirely disappeared, and it is not realized what a loss they are to young artists.

Miss Cicely Hamilton in *The Old Vic* expresses the view that the circuit system did not perish because it was a failure or had been outgrown, but that it was killed by the development of the railway, and that provincial theatres thereafter 'degenerated into dramatic lodging-houses for replicas'.

Another blow to acting as deadly as the break-up of the

circuits was the abolition in 1843 of the patent rights held by the two great houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

Now compare these records of what went to make the actor of bygone times with the preparation for the stage that we find to-day.

Young people, adults, emerge from a short period at a Dramatic School, which has been preceded by a normal, orthodox education. They have possibly few, if any, points of contact with the stage or any other form of art life. They are further handicapped by that background of 'hiding what you feel' which is a national characteristic of the Briton, and by limitations of voice and body which are due to present-day habits. Small wonder that the custom of 'casting to type' has grown so rapidly, and that, as Mr. Sherston puts it, 'the school of those who don't attempt to act at all, the so-called "natural" school of acting', is becoming the accepted expression of dramatic art of the moment.

A professional experience that befell me a few years ago affords interesting comment on the outcome of such an approach to the stage.

One of our leading actor-managers decided upon a Shakespearian production after a series of modern pieces. Associated with him was an excellent modern company, from whom he cast his Shakespeare play, but only he and his leading lady had ever played in Shakespeare before, and it soon transpired that with the exception of themselves no one could speak verse or utter anything but modern drawing-room tone. Vowels were clipped, final consonants dropped, the sonorous 'vocal' 'r', which is essential in Shakespeare, was conspicuous by its absence—'sore' being

rendered 'saw', 'door'—'daw', 'our' as 'ahr'. 'Quite' was pronounced 'quaht' or 'quate'. The final word of lines dropped unheard, and breath was unequal to the maintenance of rhythm and continuity of tone. The contrast between the leading actor and actress and the rest of the company was ludicrous. They might almost have been speaking in different languages. Certainly they were speaking in different periods.

After a few days of despairing efforts the producer suggested my being sent for, with the idea of locating me somewhere in the theatre to 'coach' every actor individually whenever he was not required on the stage. This seemed a most ingenious idea, but it was founded on a fallacy. I had to explain that the roof cannot be put on if the foundation has not been properly laid. 'Coaching' would merely have made parrots of the actors and would have destroyed every vestige of reality and spontaneity. This is what happens more often than not as a result of what is known as 'elocution'. Fundamental voice-training and muscle re-education would have been needed by almost every member of the company to bring about the requisite flexibility of the muscles of voice and articulation for the production of correct intonation and pure vowel sounds. Even more necessary would have been the training of the muscles of respiration to the degree of control required for the delivery and 'balance' of blank verse. The lack of fundamentals such as these cannot be made good by 'hints' on the eve of performance. Consequently, actors are engaged whose appearance and vocal characteristics most suggest the personages of the play.

It may be argued that conditions of modern life make it

impossible for the actor to start in childhood and to give up his whole life to it, as did the actor of bygone days. What parallel, it may be demanded, is there to-day of the Children's Companies of the Elizabethan era with their highly specialized training? How would it be possible, with the present-day strain of competitive examinations, the imperative necessity to pass through the same educational mill, and the fierce struggle for 'place', to take the risk of dedicating a child from early infancy—even if the training were procurable and the vocation unmistakable—to a career which sets it apart from its fellows?

Until very recently questions such as these have been amply justified, but conditions are altering rapidly. Changes are taking place in the education of children which should in the near future make the development and expression of dramatic talent possible. If a rational, balanced plasticity of the entire physical medium is cultivated through childhood and youth, the capacity to 'express' will be developed. This is indispensable for the actor. Without it, 'casting to type' must perforce be resorted to.

So disastrous is this custom that it needs a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER TWO

'CASTING TO TYPE'

THE custom of 'casting to type' is a menace to dramatic art. It operates in two ways, both equally stultifying. It places practically untrained people on the stage who seldom if ever progress, because, having been engaged for a part on the sole recommendation of 'looking like it' in private life, they go on repeating themselves till the end of their career, mere parrots, if they make a success in their first engagement. Or, what is even worse, they may be engaged for some *trick*, or even for a defect, say, of articulation, which is thought amusing, and this, because it is exploited, soon becomes stereotyped.

On the other hand—and this is worse still—really gifted actors who have made a legitimate and deserved success in some particular type of part are never offered any other kind.

Here are illustrations of both cases. A manager engaged for a part of some importance, which required a striking appearance, a girl whom he met at a friend's house, who was not on the stage, and had never thought of becoming an actress. She was the 'type' he wanted, and being intelligent, temperamental and teachable, and having the good fortune to be under a clever producer, she made a remarkable success. The play had a long run, at the conclusion of which she was engaged by another management for a different type of part. To the surprise of author and producer, and to her own bitter disappointment, she reproduced every tone, every inflection, every movement of the former part, and was

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quite unable to discard them and to respond to the demands of the new part. Author and producer took endless trouble in rehearsing her. In appearance she was exactly what was wanted. She had established herself as a favourite of the public, and would consequently have been of value to the production, but at the end of three weeks it was found to be hopeless. Shattered nervously, and with the confidence gone that had been such an asset before, she was obliged to resign the part.

In another case, a girl was engaged to play the part of an elderly spinster in a piece which was destined to have a very long run. Here also it was a first engagement, preceded by little or no training. It was necessary to assume a thin, high, quavering voice, and mincing manner. While the piece was still running, and she had been playing without a break for over a year, she was offered a part of a different type in a Sunday performance, when the terrible fact emerged that *she could not speak a line on the stage except in the high-pitched, 'old' tone of the part she was playing night after night.*

Another instance was that of a young actress who had made a great success in a cockney part. In her next engagement she retained much of the cockney accent in the character of a Society girl, a fact which was universally commented on in the press.

I mention these three cases because the difficulty in each was solely a matter of *voice*. Had there been the right training before going on the stage, bitter disappointment, impaired confidence and, in two of the three cases, loss of engagement would have been prevented. I can speak definitely as to this because these actresses were subsequently sent to me for lessons in voice-production by their respective managers,

and in each instance the disability was entirely overcome. If the voice were properly trained in the first place dialect or 'accent' could be assumed and discarded at will. It is only when muscles are untrained that there is any danger that the accent which is assumed for a particular part will become fixed, even when the run is a long one.

It must be remembered that voice is the result of muscular action of a peculiarly sensitive and complex kind. In the whole range of muscular activities of which the body is capable few, if any, become automatic and stereotyped so quickly as those responsible for the production of the voice. Witness the strong resemblance of tone in families, which is almost invariably stronger than the physical likeness. Wigs and make-up will be of little avail in suggesting character if the voice, the intonation, the pronunciation are always the same. How often do we not hear the remark:

'I did not recognize him when he came on to the stage, but of course I knew him directly he spoke.'

This voice problem is generally admitted, but how many realize that *facial expression tends to become stereotyped in proportion to the crystallization of the vocal characteristics.* Words are formed in the *mouth*, and not in the throat or larynx, as is often imagined; consequently it follows that active movements of mouth and face will be required for good enunciation. Vowels are formed by changes in the shape of the mouth. Consonants are the result of an immense variety of actions of jaw, soft palate, tongue, cheeks, and lips. Consequently, if an actor requires what may be called a 'character' tone he will reproduce time after time the same facial movements. These, equally with the tone, become his characteristic expression; and they will only suit one

type of part. So that literally the actor in embryo is *destroyed* by this pernicious 'casting to type', which 'fixes' his physical medium instead of rendering it plastic.

It was said recently of one of our best producers in a drama critique:

'He is a great producer but I cannot truthfully add that he is an ideal producer—at least from the unfortunate actor's point of view. He seems to start off with the assumption that the members of his company have not a grain of intelligence between them, and he proceeds to drill them, phrase by phrase, and syllable by syllable, until they have become either mesmerized marionettes or potential murderers!'

Methods such as these nearly cost the modern stage the loss of Louis Calvert.

'My technique', he said, 'was being given to me ready-made by the producer, who insisted on showing me how to do things without telling me why. This was robbing me of all freedom in my work. I felt that what natural aptitude I had was being smashed. The feeling that I had for acting was slipping away from me.'

So disastrous was the result of treating him as a puppet, and his capacity to act so thwarted, that he was told he had mistaken his vocation, that he would never make an actor, and was advised to give it up.

Surely it does not need arguing that this is no way to make an actor; it is the way to mar him irretrievably. Moreover, this evil practice is recoiling on those who perpetrate it. It reacts on author, producer, and manager, who constantly complain of the difficulty of finding the right actor when they are casting a play. They seem only to be able to think of one person for a part they wish to fill, and if he be

engaged elsewhere his management is often approached with a view to his being 'released', because he is the *type* that is wanted. Methods such as these *must* kill the art of acting, for they reduce the actor to an automaton, to a mere puppet. It must also react disastrously upon the playwright. As Bernard Shaw has said, 'practical dramatic authorship has become the art of exploiting the personalities of popular favourites'.

Undoubtedly the public is partly to blame: the dear Conservative British (or should one say, the *London*?) public, that is so loyal to old favourites, that loves and never tires of every little mannerism that characterizes them, and that has not enough interest in the art of acting to have any desire to see an unknown actor. Instances continually occur where a perfectly competent, but unknown, actor has been dispossessed of a part in favour of a less competent popular favourite. So what is the producer to do if the popular one does not 'know his job'? He is forced into treating him like a parrot, and drilling him in the speaking of every line.

Mr. Granville Barker has said that a producer usually only resorts to such arbitrary methods in desperation. 'To suggest, criticize, and co-ordinate—that *should* be the limit of his function'; so it follows that 'casting to type' is perverting the producer also. He is becoming, not the driver of a team, but the manipulator of marionettes.

It is interesting to note that the highly-finished technical excellences of French performances are not brought about by an autocratic producer, but are the outcome of the actors arguing them out amongst themselves, with author and producer as it were 'in the chair'.

Undoubtedly English and American producers are constantly forced to employ arbitrary methods, either because 'casting to type' has led to transplantation from drawing-room to stage, or because an early success in some particular line has resulted in 'arrested dramatic development'. There is also no doubt that many really gifted actors who have had the training and experience that would enable them to accomplish great things are prevented by an early and justly earned success in some definite line from ever stepping out of it.

A notable instance will be recalled by many of us. One of our most-charming and best-known actresses, of a particularly sweet personality, was never allowed to play anything but *herself*. Time after time when a piece was being cast the management had obviously said:

'This is a "Miss So-and-So" part'; and she was engaged, and always gave the same sincere, charming, competent performance, of immense value to every play in which she appeared. She had it in her to do original work, but was apparently 'stuck fast' for the rest of her career in the rut of success. But one day her chance arrived. A 'star' part came her way. She electrified the theatrical world, and established herself as a really great actress.

But how was it that through years of merely conventional parts she had retained the elasticity, the fluidity, that enabled her to take her chance when it came?

At the beginning of her stage career she had been handicapped by a poor, husky voice which was not only unequal to parts requiring strength or emotion but was frequently inaudible. Complaints reached the actor-manager—with whom she was under contract for a long term—that she

could not be heard beyond the first few rows of stalls. He knew her capacities, and being certain that only *limitations of voice* were preventing their expression sent her to me. After studying with me for a time she wrote as follows:

'My voice has improved enormously, and I feel scarcely any fatigue at the end of my exacting part where before I was husky and inaudible. I have been "breathing" on all possible occasions and doing a good many of the other exercises, and Mr. A' (the manager who sent her to me) 'has said to me a dozen times, "The improvement in your voice is quite extraordinary".'

Many under these circumstances would have assumed that having achieved audibility all that was necessary had been accomplished, and would have dropped the practice of breathing and voice exercises. But having by this time found that voice-production, besides giving her audibility, carrying-power, and ease, enabled her to 'bring through' the psychology and emotion of the characters she was interpreting, she formed the habit of working at every new part for breathing and voice-production. The result was that the muscles of voice and articulation did not become 'set' in one type of action, despite the fact that she was constantly playing the same type of part in successful pieces which had long runs, but remained flexible, responsive, and obedient. So, when a part that was big and out of the ordinary came her way, she was able to express the whole gamut of temperament and emotion. One more notable point. On the day of the production of the piece that gave her the chance of her life, she had, owing to having continued to rehearse with a severe chill, developed laryngitis. Her doctor said it would be impossible for her to appear that night; but,

though unable to utter a sound earlier in the day, thanks to trained muscles and knowledge of how to use her voice, she played, and came through the ordeal without anyone in the audience suspecting the handicap she was working under; and the play, which depended upon her, was a triumph. So far-reaching in its effects may voice-production be, not only for actor and audience, but in times of crisis which may affect the fortunes of the piece.

There have been many cases where a production has either had to be postponed, or where the performance has suffered materially, by reason of an indisposition of one of the leading actors, which knowledge of how to 'manage' the mechanism of breathing and voice would have surmounted.

To those who do not know the extraordinary degree of efficiency and control that can be effected by scientific voice-training, a mere recital of method would be unconvincing, hence I have described actual cases.

There must of course be certain broad physical limitations which cannot be transcended, but, given the right training and mastery of technique, these will prove a much smaller proportion than would be supposed.

We have only to examine the records of the past to find ample proof of this. That we have changed in our dramatic potentialities I do not for one moment believe. They are merely 'overlaid', suppressed by a variety of removable circumstances.

It is very certain that if the custom of 'casting to type' had been applied to the actors of the past many of them would never have gained a hearing.

Cecil Armstrong, in *A Century of Great Actors*, says:

'If either John Henderson, David Garrick, or Edmund

Kean were to present themselves at some London theatre to-day they would be told they were too short.' Now, John Henderson (who was a contemporary of Garrick's) was one of the brightest ornaments of the English stage, yet Armstrong says of him:

'In appearance he laboured under many physical disadvantages, which no great actor should have in theory, but which many, indeed most of them, have had in practice. Henderson had the mind and versatility of a genius. *His powers of mind completely overcame his insignificant appearance. He had not a very good voice, but he made up for its defects by magnificent elocution.*'

Had Hermann Vezin been a head taller he would have ranked with the great actors of the past; but, belonging as he did to comparatively recent times, he came under the ban of 'unsuitability of appearance'.

It is the soul of the actor that counts, not his external appearance. Garrick, for instance, was a *little* man, who in later years inclined to be stout; but this did not stand in the way of his consummate abilities, which swept all before them.

As a matter of fact, of all the great old English actors only Spranger Barry seems to have had exceptional physical advantages. Cooke and Macready laboured under serious physical defects, and John Philip Kemble struggled against chronic asthma. Macready, though extremely good-looking as a young man, had grown positively ugly when he played 'Romeo' in later life; but his acting was such as to cause it to be forgotten.

As for Edmund Kean, if ever mind, temperament, and technique triumphed over matter they did in his case.

Macready described him in his reminiscences as 'a little, mean-looking man'. Yet his greatest part was universally agreed to be 'Othello'. Writing of his performance of it, Barry Cornwall said:

'He seemed to *expand* from a small resolute figure and to assume the vigour and dimensions of a giant. The fury and whirlwind of the passions seemed to have endowed him with supernatural strength.'

And here is a remarkable account by G. H. Lewes, in *Actors and the Art of Acting*, of how Kean's son, Charles, by sheer hard work and indomitable determination, overcame incredible difficulties.

'Laughed at, ridiculed, and hissed, and for many years terribly handled by critics, both in public and private, he has worked steadily, resolutely, improvingly, till his brave perseverance has finally conquered an eminent position. He began by being a very bad actor; he has ended by forcing even such of his critics as have least sympathy with him to admit that in certain parts he is without a rival on the stage. This battle with the public he has fought by inches slowly; the force that is in him concentrated on the one object of his life has made an actor out of very unpromising materials. His career is a lesson. It shows what can and what cannot be done by courageous devotion and a burning desire to learn the resources of an art.'

Again, in *Some of our Actors*, from 'The Galaxy':

'Who can act Benedick? Charles Kean, a shrivelled old man of sixty, who looked no more like Benedick than a dried herring, gave us by sheer art the best Benedick of many a year.'

Henry Barton Baker, writing in *Our Old Actors* of the

extraordinary way the great actors of the past sank their own individualities in their parts, says:

'It is not Mr. Garrick or Mr. Kemble or Mr. Kean the public flocked to see, but their wonderful powers of transforming themselves into beings of an imaginary world. Upon the stage the individuality of the actor is absorbed in the poet's creation.'

This is the exact opposite of 'casting to type', the result of which must be to stereotype and fix the actor's own personality, together with any defects or limitations which characterize it.

Here are two instances, sufficiently close to the present time for many of us to remember, of superlative transcending of type and surmounting of very considerable physical disabilities, viz. Rossi and Irving.

Stanislavsky, in his book *My Life in Art*, gives the following most interesting analysis of Rossi's art and description of his performance, when an old man, of 'Romeo', which, in view of the fact that they were contemporaries, has an especial value. He says:

'In lyric passages, in poetic descriptions, Rossi was inimitable. He had the right to talk simply, and knew how to do it. This is very rare among actors. He had a fine voice, a wonderful ability to handle it, an unusually clear diction, a correctness of intonation, a plasticity that had reached such perfection that it became second nature to him. And his own nature was created mostly for lyric emotions and experiences.

'And all this despite the fact that his physical gifts were not of the first class. He was short, his moustaches were dyed, his hands were stumpy, his face wrinkled, but he had remarkable eyes. And with these qualities, already an old man,

Rossi interpreted "Romeo". He could not play the part any longer, but he drew its inner image to perfection. It was a courageous drawing, almost an impudent one. For instance, in the scene with the monk, Rossi rolled on the floor in despair. And this was done by an old man with a round little abdomen. But it was not funny, because it was required by the inner image of the role, by the correct and interesting psychological thread of the creation. We understood the wonderful idea. We admired Rossi; we sympathised with him.'

Was there ever a more conspicuous case of the triumph of mind over matter, of transcending of type, than that of our own Irving? A voice that was almost ugly, of strongly marked nasal quality, with many peculiarities of diction, a poor physique, narrow, contracted chest, legs that were positive caricatures of thinness—so much so that they often provoked audible derision—many glaring and irritating mannerisms: all were overborne by sheer, compelling genius. Moreover, he had not even the advantage of being unaware of his defects; he was fully conscious of them. Mortimer Menpes, in his memoir of him, said:

'No man, Miss Terry told me, was more conscious of limitations than Henry Irving. He merged himself heart and soul in whatever character he was representing; but he never forgot his limitations. He always remembered, for example, that at the beginning of his career he had been hooted at because of his thin legs. Miss Terry remembered that once when they were travelling she was sitting opposite him and had an opportunity for studying his facial expression. Irving was leaning on his stick looking thoughtful. Miss Terry asked him what he was thinking about. He answered in his deliberate way:

'"I was thinking how strange it is that I should have made

the reputation I have as an actor with nothing to help me—with no equipment." He waved one of his hands as he spoke, and said, "My legs, my voice—everything has been against me."'

So fully aware was he of the handicap that his poor voice was that when it was decided that his two sons, 'H. B.' and Laurence, should go on the stage he took steps to legislate against such a disadvantage in their case by sending them to my father for voice-production. I have often thought since that had he himself even then taken lessons in breathing, his life might have been prolonged. I watched his laboured, upper-chest breathing many a time with great concern. The fact that he had for years only used the upper part of his lungs must necessarily have been an adverse factor in his last illness.

Miss Terry in her *Life* attributed many of his defects to his not having been on the stage as a child.

'He was stiff and self-conscious', she said. 'His eyes were dull and his face heavy. . . He could not speak, he could not walk, he could not *look*.'

He asked Miss Terry on one occasion whether it was really true that he said 'Gud' for 'God'.

This is interesting corroboration of the fact that an actor cannot always hear himself; but the capacity to do so approximately is usually developed by voice-training, with its resultant power of appraising cause and effect.

Do not let us forget that at the period when English acting was at its zenith the producer was unknown. The actor was not treated as a marionette or a parrot; his conception of a part was his own, and the responsibility for his success or failure rested upon him alone. We may get a more machine-

like correctness of the production as a whole under the modern method, a certain care and finish of rendering; but by very reason of its 'calculation' and cut-and-dried methods the magic of personality is only too likely to be extinguished. As for genius handicapped by limitations of physique, what chance has it of recognition?

It would be easy to multiply examples, but the evidence I have brought forward is sufficient to show that most of the geniuses of the English stage, during a period of close on two centuries, overcame physical difficulties, limitations, and actual unsuitability, not merely by the force of genius, but by sheer hard work and *conscious effort* to conquer shortcomings.

It emerges unmistakably that had the modern custom of 'casting to type' been applied in those days the world would never have known some of its greatest geniuses, who stirred and uplifted multitudes and achieved more than mere 'lifetime' fame.

'Casting to type' if persisted in will reduce the actor to a puppet. If the actor be a puppet the mainspring of the drama is gone, and there remains no live thing to draw, and hold, and sway the public.

CHAPTER THREE

'CHARACTER' WORK

IT might very naturally be thought that the best way to prevent 'casting to type' would be to provide students with plenty of 'character' work, and in theory this is perfectly correct. If, however, students are allowed to undertake this with an untrained physical medium it is attended by considerable risk—a risk which is usually in exact proportion to their dramatic potentialities. 'Character' work is as much fraught with danger to the young actor with untrained body and voice as is the study of opera to the young singer whose voice is not yet 'placed'. Nor is the danger necessarily obviated by the fact that voice and body are in course of being trained in conjunction with the acting work; that is, if instruction in these essentials is given in large classes. Individual instruction may safeguard the pupil, but even so it is most unwise to take up the study of parts, especially exacting 'character parts', before the physical medium has been trained. The curriculum, including as it does voice-production, dancing, fencing, movement, ear-training, languages, dramatic history and literature, and rehearsal classes, is so full that students have all they can do to memorize their parts. To carry out anything like adequate voice-practice is impossible. Every one who is studying for a stage career wants PARTS. Very naturally. Few realize that their whole future probably depends on their physical and vocal training. Many fully-fledged actors who have found, too late, that their house has been built on sand, have told me that in their student days they were not interested in the

voice-work, and, moreover, that there was no time to practise even had they wished to do so.

Suppose a boy on leaving school embarks on a stage career and commences with the study and rehearsal of a range of big parts. He may have hard, rigid muscles. There may be some form of spinal curvature, wrong weight distribution, a heart strained by rowing or running. His body as a whole will probably lack plasticity, at the least. He will have no control of breath; indeed, most likely, his lung capacity will be insufficiently developed. His throat muscles will be weak and stiff. He no doubt has the closed, contracted, tight throat, which is characteristic of the Englishman. His tongue is almost certain to be unruly, blocking up his throat, and filling the sounding-chamber of the mouth. It is not likely to be sufficiently flexible to enunciate consonants distinctly, or to form and maintain the necessary adjustments for pure and sustained vowel sounds. His jaw will probably be rigid and he will not be able to open his mouth. His cheeks and lips will either be weak and flaccid or stiff and immobile. Nasal resonance will probably be conspicuous by its absence, and he may quite possibly have chronic nasal catarrh, perhaps not very marked, but sufficient to make a clear, ringing note impossible.

Now, allow this lad to work straightway at a range of big parts, of varied types of character, and in direct ratio with his dramatic potentialities will be the risk of his doing himself harm. He will injure his voice, and will acquire habits of *effort* which may become so firmly established that ease and spontaneity may never be achievable. It will not have entered his consciousness that he has no business to be *labouring* for his effects; for enthusiastic youth is apt to think

there is no virtue in performance which is unattended by effort. Even in these days of 'casualness' this attitude towards dramatic performance is still frequently exemplified in the following story of David Garrick. In order to demonstrate that acting could be perfectly convincing divested of rhodomontade, ranting, or accessories, he described graphically in private life an imaginary tragic incident, as if he had witnessed it. His listeners were deeply moved and reduced to tears. When at the conclusion he told them that he had invented the episode and that he had been acting they were incredulous.

'Acting?' they protested; 'that wasn't acting—it was quite natural!'

So with the ardent youngster turned loose with stirring parts. He thinks that unless he is 'tearing passion to tatters', and making violent efforts, he is not 'acting'. Nor are matters much better if parts that require power and pathos are avoided and what are technically known as 'character' and old parts are studied, for they frequently lead to bad body positions and an unnatural tone being adopted before a good natural technique has been acquired. Nothing is so difficult as to be natural. Even children, as is so often demonstrated on the stage, frequently cannot speak words naturally which are not their own, and cannot even laugh naturally to order. I remember an amusing instance of this when a small girl was 'hearing' the words of a part I was studying. We came to a place where a laugh was indicated.

'You've got to laugh', she prompted conscientiously.

I explained that it was not easy to laugh in cold blood, and that I was not going to try to do it when saying my words.

My small friend thought I was very wrong not to follow the directions implicitly, and was not convinced as to there being any difficulty in laughing to order. It happened that I was called out of the room just then, and as I returned a few moments later I heard weird, choking sounds suggestive of the endeavour to eject a fish-bone from the back of the throat. When I inquired anxiously what was the matter my little friend confessed that she had been trying to laugh!

Now, suppose that a lad with physical and vocal faults and limitations studies a wide range of 'character' parts, particularly those requiring dramatic power and emotion. Without a doubt he will 'force'. It is inevitable. He may exhaust himself physically. He may actually injure his vocal cords. He will probably strain breathing and throat. He may achieve a certain amount of success, but he will not be able to realize a tithe of his potentialities, if indeed he emerge from his training at all.

Here is a case in point which came under my notice. A lad of seventeen entered for stage training at a dramatic school. He was big, broad, and manly, with a remarkably deep, rich voice. Personality and voice suggested the age of twenty-five rather than seventeen. He was brimming with emotion and dramatic intuition. There appeared to be no defect, trick, or weakness that might be likely to stand in his way, and it seemed as though all would be plain sailing. Young men at the school were, as is often the case, in a minority. So this lad was allotted a large number of big parts in the rehearsal classes and end-of-term performances, amongst them being 'Richard III'. What was the result? At the end of a year he was a nervous wreck. He complained that he was always tired. His vocal cords were strained. He

had twice had laryngitis. His throat was congested and granulated. He had acquired noisy, gasping, upper-chest breathing. His throat ached continually. The voice that had promised so well had lost all its quality. It was tight, strained, and artificial, and frequently 'cracked' in a way that was most distressing. He could not forget his voice for a moment, consequently the fervour and spontaneity which had been so striking at the commencement of his training had vanished.

His is perhaps an exceptional case. Disaster of this kind is not likely to overcome the mediocre. It is precisely the exceptional creature who is likely to come to grief for want of the right foundation, the knowledge of how to express what is burning within him. And so a great actor may be lost to the world.

It is essential if we would set the personality, the temperament, free to express itself, to interpret for us a wide range of characters, that we develop and bring under control the actor's tools, his voice, and his body, his entire physical medium. *This must be done before he commences to study parts*, otherwise the embryo artist will either wreck himself, or he will settle and crystallize into a 'type'; and then, instead of 'in his time playing many parts' he will play only one part—himself.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ACTOR'S PHYSICAL EQUIPMENT

THERE is no escape from the fact that every art which is dependent upon an executant for its interpretation and expression must be conditioned more or less in proportion to the suitability of the physical medium. In some cases, however great the potentialities of spirit, mind, conception, and temperament, physical limitations may prove insuperable. A defect of vision may deprive the world of a great painter. Shortness of fingers may stand in the way of a possible virtuoso of violin or piano. Physical unsuitability may bar the way to success for an operatic singer. Ill-health may preclude a career, or bring it to a premature close. Lack of inches or faulty proportions may be an insurmountable barrier to an actor or an actress. It may of course be argued that inherent physical suitability determines the choice of the particular form of art expression, but while this may be true up to a point we have evidence that in some of the world's most successful artists—in fact, in some of the outstanding cases of genius—physical unsuitability and even actual defects of a serious kind have been present and have been fought against and overcome. Innumerable instances spring to the mind of handicaps that seemed insuperable—and indeed were pronounced to be so at the outset of the career by authorities who were in every way competent to judge—having been surmounted by courage, dogged determination, training, and hard work.

Beethoven, we know, composed some of his greatest music after the terrible affliction of deafness had descended

upon him. Leonardo da Vinci learnt to paint with his left hand in the last few years of his life after his right arm had become paralysed. An armless artist has painted with his toes. An Austrian pianist who lost his right arm in the war resolved, when lying on the battlefield, that if he were found and his life saved he would surmount the loss and carry on his professional career. And so he actually did, adapting compositions for performances with the left hand only, with such success that music was written specially for him. Strauss composed concertos for him, and leading London critics stated that he had brought his left-handed technique to such a pitch that he gave brilliant performances of music which was too difficult for most two-handed pianists. These are extreme cases, but they demonstrate that apparently insuperable obstacles can be removed.

It may not even be suspected by audiences that several actors of the present time who lost a limb in the war use an artificial one, so successfully have they surmounted the difficulties thereof. Some were 'gassed', or sustained serious injury and nerve-shock through air 'crashes' that might well have prevented them from returning to the stage, which they nevertheless through indomitable pluck and determination have done.

But unless a person intend to confine himself to low comedy, or 'character' work, there are certain outstanding defects of proportion which should absolutely deter him from adopting the stage as a profession, such, for example, as an unduly large head, a spinal curvature (unless it can be put right), one leg shorter than the other, or a long body and short legs. It is related of an actress who had all the necessary temperamental qualifications but was unfortunate

enough to suffer from the last-named disproportion, that someone seeing her for the first time thought at the commencement of her opening scene that she was kneeling down. Her legs were so short that this was the impression made upon a person who was some distance from the stage.

I remember a discussion which made a deep impression on me as a child, when some of the most brilliant men of the time were spending an evening with us, amongst them being E. W. Godwin, the great archaeologist; Oscar Wilde, William Archer, Hermann Vezin, and Professor Sir Hubert von Herkomer (then Professor Herkomer).

The question had arisen as to whether it were possible to define the physical conditions which give rise to a fine voice.

'I think it must be a question of proportion', said my father.

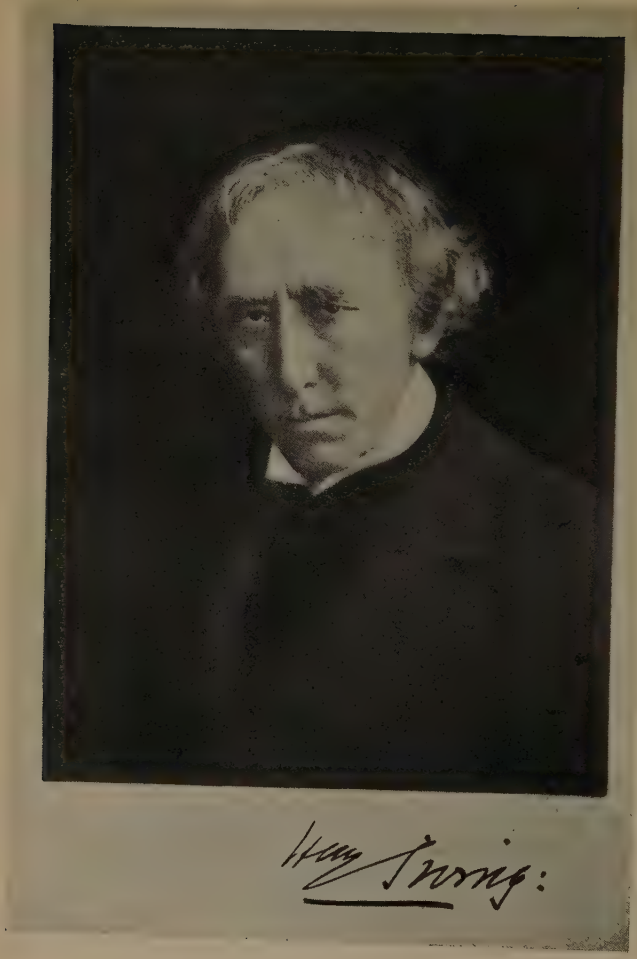
'Ha!' exclaimed Godwin—and I remember that I was quite startled at his shout of approval—'you've said it, Behnke. Proportion, that's the explanation; and proportion must be ascertainable, and where it is found to be irremediably "out" in the would-be singer he should be discouraged from attempting the impossible.'

Thus the archaeologist, to whom the study of 'proportion' was of supreme interest and importance. Certainly, facts of vocal physiology which were brought to light and correlated by my father have furnished data of the greatest value in judging physical potentialities or drawbacks in regard to voice.[1] Undoubtedly there are definite ascertainable points of proportion which determine vocal possibilities.

[1] I have related the above in my book *Singers' Difficulties* (Cassell), but it may be repeated in connexion with the actor, to whom it is as significant as to the singer.

My dear friend, Behnke,
Pray accept this counterfeit presentment in
token of the invaluable benefit derived from your
teaching by
Your grateful pupil
Hermann Vezin
Dec 21, 1888

HERMANN VEZIN



SIR HENRY IRVING

A fine voice will seldom be found with a hatchet-shaped face, or where chest and shoulders are unduly narrow, unless counterbalanced by unusually favourable facial proportions. *Breadth* is the important factor—breadth of chest, face, and nose. Call to mind the appearance of singers and actors who have had really fine, resonant voices and we shall find that 'breadth' is almost invariably their distinguishing physical characteristic. Compare the photographs I give of two great actors who will be in the memory of many of us, viz. Irving and Vezin. Irving's face was long and narrow, the nose high-bridged and narrow, shoulders high, chest narrow. Vezin's breadth was striking—a broad face, considerable breadth of bridge of nose, widely-dilated nostrils, broad, magnificently-carried shoulders, and broad, strong chest.

A poor, thin voice, of nasal quality, with indistinct enunciation and laboured breathing, proceeded from Irving. Vezin's voice was resonant, carrying, and sonorous, and his enunciation clear. But even Vezin's natural advantages in the matter of 'vocal' proportions did not enable him to dispense with voice-training.

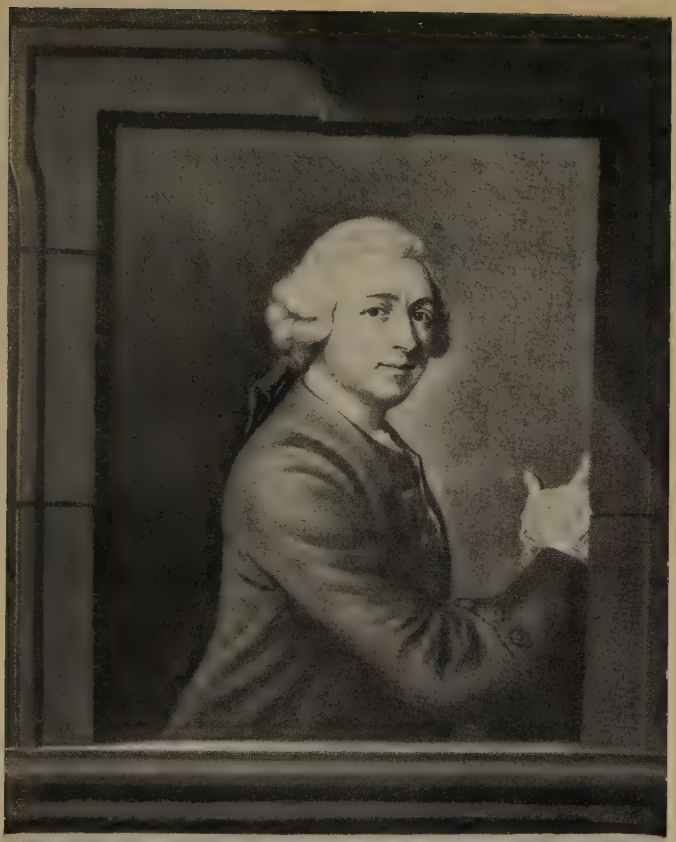
Those who saw his 'Macbeth' at the Lyceum, after seeing Irving, when he stepped into the breach on the occasion of Irving's illness (playing at a few hours' notice, without rehearsal), will recall vividly—it was unforgettable—the difference that Vezin's resonant, vibrant, sonorous voice, with its magnificent clarity of diction, made to the whole performance.

It is not necessary to go solely to the stage for examples. An officer who studied voice-production with me because of throat strain when giving words of command provided an

interesting comparison of this kind. His face was narrow, nose high-bridged and narrow, with collapsed, almost indrawn nostrils. His voice was destitute of nasal resonance and throaty in the extreme. In the course of my demonstration of nasal resonance and its immense value in the carrying-power and ease of the voice, together with an explanation of the bearing upon it of the proportions of the face, he recalled the fact that when in charge of some irrigation work in the Soudan he had tried to shout directions to a detachment of men on the opposite bank of the Nile. Again and again he shouted, and failed to make himself heard. He then delegated the matter to an Arab, and was very struck to find that the man made himself heard without the smallest effort, and he recollected, in view of my explanation, that the Arab's face was broad and the nose broad, with widely-dilated nostrils.

These proportions of face, shoulders, and chest are very obvious in singers. Think, for instance, of Sims Reeves, Caruso, and Melba—to mention only three out of numbers that spring to the mind. They can be seen very clearly in a photograph of Sims Reeves that is in my possession, which he gave me when I was studying English ballads and oratorio with him. No one who heard him can fail to recall the resonance and carrying-power of his voice, its soaring ease, and the superlative clearness of his diction. Great work lay behind it all, but no work could have produced these results had there been anything fundamentally wrong with his physical proportions.

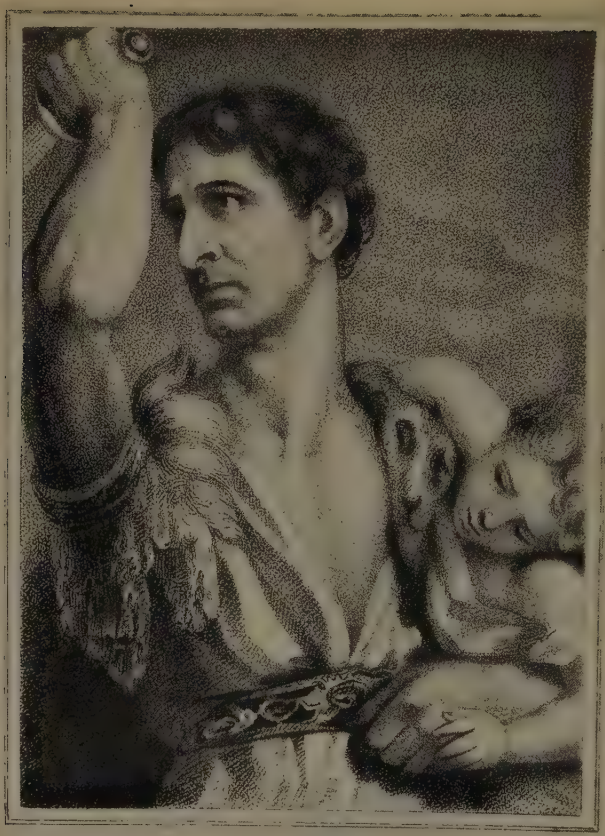
Sarah Bernhardt, in discussing the equipment of the actor, lays down as essential the possession of *excellent bodily proportions* and a fine voice. To these she adds voice-production,



David Garrick Esq.

Done from the Original Picture Painted at Turin 1763

Mr. Garrick commenced English Actor he made his first appearance at Ipswich in Suffolk and performed there with great Applause in the Character of Aboan in the Tragedy of Oroonoko in the Winter of 1740 from thence he went to Goodman's Fields Theatre where he performed Richard the 3d Hamlet Lear &c. &c. with universal Applause and Admiration and continued there till the Summer of 1742 when he went to Dublin where he performed with great Success for two Seasons and returned to London in the Winter of 1742 and performed at Drury Lane Theatre in the Character of Richard the 3d which he performed the first Night with universal Applause and continued performing there with great Success till the Summer of 1746 when he went to Dublin and performed there with great Success for two Seasons and returned to London in the Winter of 1747 and performed at Drury Lane Theatre where he continued performing with great Success till the Year 1776 when he retired from the Stage and died at his House at Hampton on the 20th of January 1779 aged 63



M^R KEMBLE,

AS ROLLA.

Engraved by BENJ: HOLL, from a drawing by WAGEMAN.

pronunciation, breathing, gesture, and expression. Again and again does she return to the matter of good proportions and fine voice as being of paramount importance.

Certainly these views will find ample corroboration if we study face and chest in portraits and busts of the old actors. Look, for example, at Thomas Betterton, David Garrick, John Henderson, Colley Cibber, Master Betty (the Infant Roscius), Munden, Macready, Macklin, Buckstone, William Farren, Mrs. Cibber, and Mrs. Pritchard. In them all will be seen remarkable breadth of face and of nose, widely-dilated nostrils, and generous, flexible mouths. These points are particularly noticeable in Betterton, Garrick, and John Henderson. We find in the accounts of all of them universal praise of their fine voices.

Compare with these the proportions in portraits of Kemble and Irving. In Kemble we have the same facial characteristics as in Irving—a narrow face, high, narrow nose, and tight mouth. Both were ill equipped vocally and both had to contend with maladies that were particularly prejudicial to the voice. Kemble suffered from asthma and Irving from a tendency to bronchitis.

It need not be assumed, however, that unless the fundamental proportions are very outstandingly adverse they make good voice, or perhaps I should say the *development* of good voice, impossible. I refer more particularly to the *speaking* voice, for a wonderful 'organ' is not so necessary to the speaker as to the singer. Modern scientific knowledge, the help of a good voice specialist, perseverance, and hard work can accomplish marvels.

Take the cases, for example, of my father, my mother, and myself. The 'proportions' were, as can be seen in our

photographs, more favourable to voice in the case of my father and myself, though he and I both overcame by breathing and other exercises considerable delicacy of health. My mother's proportions were less favourable, by reason of her much narrower facial make; but these drawbacks were overcome by training, and her voice was always perfectly clear and audible in her lectures and teaching. Most certainly, we all three owed the surmounting of considerable physical disability to my father's breathing exercises, which are the keystone of his method of voice-training. These exercises are fully described in their various developments in the books of our method.[1] Details are given of gains in lung capacity, amounting to as much as 50 to 80 cubic inches and increase of chest girth of anything up to 5 inches, resulting from their practice. Moreover, by means of exercises for the acquirement of nasal resonance, that all-important sounding-chamber, the cavity of the nose, *can frequently be enlarged and developed*, with a resultant improvement in quality, resonance, and carrying-power that is remarkable. When the almost invariable 'breadth' of face, nose, and chest in the possessors of fine voices, to which I have drawn attention, is borne in mind the value of scientific training that can remedy deficiencies in so vital a matter will be appreciated. I desire to stress this point, for the extent to which unfavourable conditions, and even actual physical defects, may be overcome is not realized.

Of course fundamental misproportions, such as too big a head, too long a body, and legs that are too short, cannot

[1] *The Mechanism of the Human Voice,* by Emil Behnke (Curwen); *The Speaking Voice,* by Mrs. Emil Behnke (Curwen); *Singers' Difficulties,* by Kate Emil-Behnke (Cassell).

EMIL BEHNKE

MRS. EMIL-BEHNKE

be altered; but there is not the slightest doubt that very many shortcomings which would either be a barrier to success on the stage or would limit the actor to one type of character—probably humorous—can be overcome.

I shall deal later with the matter of voice and the bearing upon it of developing breath-power and control, freedom of throat, and the acquirement of resonance. I mention it here because it must be clearly understood that voice cannot be considered as a thing apart from the body. It is influenced for good or ill by certain physical proportions and 'correspondences'. The Italians say that one sings and speaks with the whole body, and if this be true—as in the widest sense it certainly is—it will be obvious that the voice must be affected for good or ill by conditions, adjustments, and co-ordinations of the body as a whole.

Take the matter of lateral spinal curvature. How many people realize that a slight degree of this all-too-common defect has any effect upon the voice or upon general physical efficiency? Let us see how this may be.

Breath is the vital capacity. It is, as we know, the informing agent of the entire body. Its function is the elimination and exchange of carbonic acid gas for oxygen, a process which is the prime necessity of existence. It is also the motive power of voice. Consequently any condition of body which prevents adequate breathing must necessarily react equally unfavourably upon health, vitality, circulation, resistive capacity to disease, staying-power in every physical activity, elasticity (that all-important attribute to the actor), and upon the volume and carrying-power of the voice, attack of tone, and pitch.

If there be a lateral spinal curvature, the ribs will be

collapsed on one side of the body. This prevents the lung on that side from expanding, and interferes with the movements of the diaphragm—a muscle which is of supreme importance to the actor. It also means that one shoulder will be lower than the other, which is ugly. The weight of the body will be persistently on one leg, which was probably the cause of the curvature in the first place. The knee of the other leg will be bent and flaccid, like that of a broken-down horse.

All these faults are ugly, and most prejudicial to the actor; not only because they are ugly—which in itself is a sufficient reason for combating such a condition—but because breath, the motive power of voice, is interfered with.

Resonance is also interfered with, because the chest, which is an important sounding-board, will be slack and low, and because spring, elasticity, and plasticity of the body are thereby materially impeded.

This matter of slight spinal curvature is taken far too lightly, if indeed it be in any way realized. The tailor says: 'You have one shoulder a little lower than the other, sir, or madam. We will rectify it with some padding.' But to conceal a defect is not to rectify it. Even if it can be concealed in a man wearing modern clothes it is impossible of concealment for a woman in modern clothes.

There is a certain leading actress of temperament, brains, and charm who suffers from this defect, and, to anyone with an eye for proportion, it is painfully obvious. Moreover, those who have knowledge of cause and effect in these matters will realize that it is responsible for limiting her to light, modern work, if only on account of the resultant thin voice and lack of breath-control.

The person who has one shoulder lower than the other is, if aware of it, usually under the impression that it is a little physical idiosyncrasy going no farther than the shoulder. To learn that it is due to a curvature is generally a great surprise. That it could possibly have any bearing upon lung capacity and control of breath, or upon movement and plasticity, is seldom if ever suspected. Spinal irregularities are usually carefully attended to in childhood. In adult life they are either not detected, or it is assumed that it is too late to correct them. This is an error. Given proper remedial exercises they can generally be completely overcome.

There is unfortunately no standard of physique nowadays aside from the development of special muscles for the purposes of a special occupation or sport. This is beginning at the wrong end; that is, the body is not considered from the point of view of correctness of proportion and beauty of line, nor is it put through a comprehensive training, *commencing* with the developing of the respiratory muscles, to secure a balanced whole before hard training for any kind of sport is taken up. It is well known that irrevocable damage is often done to the heart by rowing and running races prematurely, which may cripple a man for life.

Even from the limited, one-sided point of view of specialism in muscles, how often does the actor ask himself what is the special muscle-training required by his profession?

At most it is conceded that some special training may be needed if his 'line' is going to be 'classic' or 'costume' work of any kind. He may feel it incumbent upon him to have lessons in dancing, or he may take up a little fencing; but the tendency grows apace of 'coaching' for the needs of

the moment. Just the dance or fight is learnt that is required for the part that is being rehearsed.

I once said to an actor who had mentioned his visits to a well-known fencing school that I was glad that he had taken up this magnificent training, and he replied:

'Oh, dear me, no! I can't fence. I only went there to learn my fight when I played "Hamlet".'

Perfunctory, superficial work such as this is totally inadequate; all the more so in view of the fact that many of our national characteristics and shortcomings are inhibitory to the expression of dramatic art. Moreover, modern habits tend to render these characteristics more and more fixed, and in order to overcome them definite work must be carried out.

The actors of former times surmounted them partly because they began at such an early age and partly because of the strenuous and comprehensive nature of their training.

A study of this matter shows beyond question that present-day methods do not make for such plasticity and wide range of expression. Unless this be realized and rectified it may cost us that compelling genius which is the lodestar that will always draw the public to the theatre.

We must face the fact that the general trend nowadays is more and more towards the repression and concealment of every sign of emotion and animation. The accepted type of Englishman—indeed, it may be said, the ideal type—is the 'strong, silent man', who betrays no indication of his feelings.

The actor's business is to *express*, not to *repress* emotion; consequently this national idea is the very reverse of what goes to make an actor. Further, it necessarily tends to

crystallize any physical idiosyncrasy. Consequently, in the absence of early, comprehensive training of the body and voice it must lead to 'casting to type'.

As long as physical suitability is the determining factor in the engagement of an actor the art of acting will be stultified, and opportunities and incentive will become less and less for the overcoming of defects that may overshadow genius.

What incentive is there to train, or to continue to study, to work at the voice and the physical medium, when the untrained obtain engagements for no other reason than 'suitability of type'?

But let the actor who desires to emancipate himself from this thraldom take heart, for there are signs that dramatic revival is upon us. Let him 'take Time by the forelock'; let him be found ready when the moment comes; let him take stock of himself, obtain the necessary training, *and practise daily* as an instrumentalist would. He *must* realize that his body is his instrument, and that he must train it, and bring it, and keep it, to the highest possible pitch of health, strength, and plasticity.

'Voice, look, and gesture are the actor's symbols, through which he makes intelligible the emotions of the character he is personating', says G. H. Lewes. 'No amount of sensibility will avail unless it can express itself adequately by these symbols. It is not enough for an actor to *feel*; he must represent. He must express his feelings in symbols universally intelligible and affecting. A harsh, inflexible voice, a rigid or heavy face would prevent even Shakespeare from being impressive and affecting on the stage; whereas a man with little sensibility but endowed with a sympathetic, penetrating

voice and a flexible physiognomy would rouse the pit to transports.'

Note the insistence on *flexibility* of face and voice. Equally important, if not more so, is flexibility of body.

Sarah Bernhardt, whose 'golden voice' was so much eulogized, attached *more* importance to the functioning of the body on the stage than to the voice.

'There is one matter', she said, 'that does not receive sufficient attention in our elocution classes, and that is *action*. . . It is only action that rouses the emotion or the terror of the public. Elocution and action may be mutually exclusive. When they are combined it is so much the better for the public, but the actor must never forget that action is the supreme mistress.'

It may be noted in passing that it was her opinion that the flexibility of the lips may be interfered with by the use of grease rouge and articulation thereby impaired. And if grease rouge interferes with the flexibility of the lips, how much more must not the necessity to wear a moustache or beard? So it follows that to overcome such a handicap as this the muscles of the mouth must be rendered especially flexible and strong.

When I was playing with Professor Sir Hubert von Herkomer in his production at Bushey of François Coppée's *Le Luthier de Crémone* (translated into English by Alfred Berlyn) he found his moustache and beard such a handicap to the facial expression required in this very moving part that he shaved them off.

I had the amusing experience of being with him at his first appearance in public afterwards, in a box at the First Night of Sir Frank (then plain F. R.) Benson's memorable

SIR HUBERT von HERKOMER

production at the Old Globe Theatre of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. No one recognized Herkomer. Puzzled looks were directed at our box: opera glasses were levelled at him again and again, and evidently there was considerable discussion going on as to his identity. After enjoying the mystification for some time he put his opera hat in front of the lower part of the face, where the beard had so recently been. There was a murmur of amused recognition, and the box was stormed.

The photograph I give (which has never before been published) shows very clearly the sensitive, plastic mouth which the beard had till then concealed. In his case the drawback of a somewhat narrow face was overcome by flexibility of the muscles of cheeks, mouth, and nostrils.

If the *French* actor does not, as Bernhardt suggested, attach sufficient importance to the acquirement of flexibility—when it may be said to be an inherent characteristic of his—how much less does the *English* actor?

The American actor is much more 'flexible' in face and body than the Englishman; consequently he has more 'pace'. He may owe something of this to natural ease and plasticity, but in my opinion it can more rightfully be attributed to serious training and specializing. When an American takes up a career or a sport he makes it the business of his life to acquire and master everything experts can show him.

In this connexion the following remarks of Mr. Agate's in the *Sunday Times* of 13 June 1926 will be of interest:

'Miss Jane Cowl received a tremendous ovation after the second act and again at the end of the play. It is a foolish thing to declare any actress first-class on the strength of a

single part or performance. But if Miss Cowl can play anything else—and her "Juliet" has won renown—then she is a very fine artist indeed. She has no devastating prettiness; her features are a battle-ground for the emotions rather than a lawn for garden-party simpering. She has, as Biron puts it, "a velvet brow, with two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes", and her countenance not only betrays past storms, but foretells those to come. This actress has poise, and pace, and she delivers the second-act tirade as such things ought to be delivered, while her sullens at the end are magnificent. Miss Cowl acts with her whole body, and her gestures are expressive enough to convey meaning to anybody who should know no English. She has that style which is almost a physical quality, understanding, and temperament. Finally, she possesses what the French call "le *la* du rôle".'

This rightly-praised technique is not likely to have descended on Miss Cowl as the 'dew from Heaven'. We may be sure that it was deliberately sought after and acquired by long and hard work. The less it is a natural attribute that the features are so flexible as to be 'a battleground for the emotions', and the body and gestures flexible enough to convey meaning to anyone not understanding the language spoken, the more essential is it to take up definite training to bring this about, to begin it *young*, before the muscles have become 'set', and to keep up steady, regular, daily practice to maintain it in training.

Mr. Shaw, discussing the swiftness and certainty of physical command which were the characteristics of a certain great actress, said:

'This *physical talent* which is seldom consciously recognized except when it is professedly specialized in some particular direction, will, when accompanied by nimbleness of mind,

quick observation, and lively theatrical instinct, carry any actress with a rush to the front of her profession.'

How many English actors take up such systematic training of the body as will render it flexible and bring it under the control of the brain? Golf, excellent though it may be for the health, will not accomplish this; neither will 'jazz' and the like. None of the ordinary physical activities are sufficient.

Muscles that are required to perform actions other than those of everyday life, or to perform them in response to the demands of the character that is being portrayed, as against the spontaneous unordered function of real life, must be trained and rendered plastic so that they can respond instantly to the demands made upon them.

It is quite beside the point to argue that they need no special training because they are part of the natural functions and potentialities of the body.

There is as much difference between the underlying motives as there is between what may be termed the 'spontaneous' performance of a pet animal in its own home and the performances at command night after night in public.

It is as necessary for the actor as for the dancer to train the body and to keep it in training by regular, daily exercises. Every joint and every muscle must be rendered flexible and obedient. Not only must speed of movement be developed—of tongue as well as of limb—but the power to maintain a position with ease and tranquillity must be mastered, that capacity known as 'repose' which is the most difficult to acquire and which is the outcome, not of 'grip' or rigidity, but of *plasticity*.

The actor may be required to run through the whole

gamut of emotion in the course of one performance; to show in the space of one evening the passing of youth to age; to assume all manner of little traits of movement indicative of different characters. Nothing but a high degree of flexibility can enable this to be done.

In every branch of art anything stereotyped, anything in the nature of stiffness and rigidity, is fatal, and in none more than that of the actor.

It must be remembered that the actor's bodily expression is not confined to the moments when he is speaking. He has to carry on the drama that is being enacted when other characters are speaking and he himself is silent. This requires the highest degree of sensitive plasticity. A gesture, an actual movement, is often not permissible, because it would detract from the attention to the person who is speaking, yet *something* must indicate what the character who is not actually speaking is feeling. How without words and without a definite gesture is this to be accomplished? By a flash of expression, a ripple or clench of muscles, mere adumbrations of emotion, only possible by the acme of flexibility.

It was in this that Duse was supreme. She could present to the other characters, as one would in life, a face that betrayed no sign of what she felt, but to the audience her emotion was conveyed by so slight a thing as a tremor of the knee.

Not only must the control be such that a movement which denotes emotion must not be exaggerated but it must not be allowed to degenerate into a trick. A leading actor was criticized lately for twitching his knees in emotional scenes. The movement was so incessant as to be actually irritating.

No one who saw Duse can forget her sensitive hands, so

expressively used that every shade of emotion was conveyed by them. As for the mobility of her face:—every thought as she spoke, or as she listened to other characters speaking, brought about changes in it which were marvellous in their delicacy and subtlety. That not a tithe of her audiences understood Italian mattered not, for they read the story of the play in her face and in every movement of her body.

As Mr. Shaw put it: 'With a tremor of the lip which you feel rather than see, and which lasts for half an instant, she touches you straight on the very heart.'

Who that saw her can ever forget the beauty of her movements and their apparent spontaneity, the exquisite poses into which she fell so naturally? How many realized that they were other than the spontaneous outcome of genius?

Duse's classic poses were due to the fact that as a child she absorbed the spirit of Greek art. She would sit for hours gazing at Greek statues *and copying their positions*. Nor did this end with her childhood. The habit remained with her through the greater part of her career of visiting museums and art galleries in every town in which she acted, and studying classic art—in particular, statuary. Her exquisite art was worked for, slaved for. She was half-starved as a child and without education. She grew up on the stage, commencing at four years of age. Though she rehearsed all day, playing a different part every night, travelling constantly, she studied incessantly, read voraciously, mastered French, and left nothing undone that could increase culture, and add to the control of voice and body.

'Duse', said Mr. Shaw, 'produces the illusion of being infinite in variety of beautiful pose and motion. Every idea, every shade of thought and mood, expresses itself delicately

but vividly to the eye; and yet, in an apparent million of changes and inflections it is impossible to catch any line of an awkward angle, or any strain interfering with the perfect abandonment of all the limbs to what appears to be their natural gravitation towards the finest grace. She is ambidextrous and supple, like a gymnast or a panther; only the multitude of ideas which find physical expression in her movements are all of that high quality which marks off humanity from the animals and, I fear I must add, from a good many gymnasts.'

As G. H. Lewes pointed out, people generally overrate a fine actor's genius and underrate his trained skill.

The tendency to accept the performances of great actors as the spontaneous outcome of genius is much to be deplored, for it prevents the training and hard work from being undertaken by which alone their art is released.

Again and again writers on the art of acting lament that there is neither standard of training nor record of how the great actors of the past achieved their results. Here is what Louis Calvert says on the matter in his *Problems of an Actor*:

'Why did I, and every other novice, have to begin in the dark, and carve out our own standards and traditions? It seemed to me, and seems to me now, a great misfortune that there is no body of literature on the actor's art to which the novice might go for guidance. I do not mean text-books on elocution (heaven forbid!)—I mean books of opinion, books of experience, which might embody the time-enduring, time-tested traditions of our art. But there is no such body of literature. There is no lack of books dealing with the lives of those in the actor's profession. But few of them shed any light on the technique by which the admired actors of the past rose to high place.'

Stanislavsky expresses precisely similar views, and deplores that the 'arpeggi, scales, counterpoint, composition, perspective, of the other arts, are lacking in relation to the art of the actor, and make of that art an accidental impromptu'.

It frequently happens that those intimately connected with a thing may fail to see what lies in their very path. Those who can bring a more detached, impersonal investigation to bear may find the clue to the mystery. An impartial study of the lives of the old great actors makes plain that though they may not have attempted to formulate a theory of training or technique they possessed one. Its nature may be deduced from the accounts of their training, for we find an underlying, fundamental identity of experience in them all. Needless to say, there is no suggestion to be found anywhere of a system for the creation of inspiration. What we find universally is that the voice and the body have been subjected to long, serious training, the outcome of which has been such plasticity as to render them obedient, responsive vehicles for the expression of the whole gamut of emotion and characterization. The greater the artist the more complete is the mastery of the physical medium.

Joseph Shepherd Munden, for instance, was spoken of as one of the most convincing actors that ever trod the stage because of his marvellous powers of facial expression.

Charles Lamb wrote of him:

'There is one face of Farley, one of Knight, one of Liston, but Munden has none that you can properly pin down and call *his*. When you think he has exhausted his battery of looks . . . he suddenly sprouts out an entirely new set of features, like Hydra. He is not one, but legion . . . He

literally *makes* faces. I have seen this gifted actor diffuse a glow of sentiment which has made the pulse of a crowded theatre beat like that of one man.'

G. H. Lewes said of Rachel:

'Her thin, nervous frame vibrated with emotion. Her face, which would have been common had it not been aflame with genius, was capable of intense expression. Her gestures were so fluent and graceful that merely to see her would have been a rare delight.'

And speaking of Kean, Lewes says:

'He was a consummate master of passionate expression. People generally spoke of him as a type of "impulsive actor". But if by this they meant one who abandoned himself to the impulse of the moment without forethought or pre-arranged effect, nothing could be wider from the mark. He was an Artist, and in Art all effects are regulated . . . He vigilantly and patiently rehearsed every detail, trying the tones until his ear was satisfied, practising looks and gestures until his artistic sense was satisfied, and having once regulated these he never changed them.'

The great actors of the past were not Heaven-created geniuses who owed nothing to training and work. If we want to follow in their footsteps and to carry on the tradition of great acting we must revise our ideas of training. We must begin young and we must realize that it is of paramount importance to bring the entire physical medium under control. Only when this is done will what Stanislavsky calls the 'super-conscious creative apparatus' be released.

CHAPTER FIVE

PHYSICAL TRAINING VERSUS GESTURE

I HAVE referred in the previous chapter to Kean practising looks and gestures, and this brings us to the vexed question whether Gesture should be taught. There was to some extent a case for it in the days when Heroic and Romantic in drama were the vogue, but now, with the prevalence of modern plays in which gesture is scarcely used, the desirability is more than ever doubtful.

But we do still have our performances of Shakespeare, though with regrettable infrequency, and we do have occasional presentations of Greek plays and Romantic Drama: while, thanks to Sir Nigel Playfair and his co-directors, there is usually a Restoration comedy, or something of that kind, with us.

Critics constantly note that 'movement' is seldom carried out in the grand manner, and the speculation arises as to whether present-day training is sufficiently catholic. We know that many actors will not play in Shakespeare because it is said to unfit them for modern work, and although this view is usually held chiefly in regard to the manner of speech it certainly also applies to movement and gesture.

Such a view is much to be deplored, as bringing about a limitation of the actor which is quite out of keeping with all the principles of the art of acting.

It should not, however, be assumed that, because physical expression in modern pieces is on what may be called 'a drawing-room scale', physical training is unnecessary. Expression, whether physical or vocal, on a big scale is usually

intrinsically easier than the finer degrees, which require much more flexibility.

The question then follows, whether gesture should be taught as such, and the actor told that certain movements are indicative of certain forms of emotion, and that he must practise them.

In my opinion, this is on all-fours with the copying of the teacher's or producer's inflections, and is only too likely to lead to a stilted artificiality. Given that the student understands the character and the emotions he is interpreting, and that physical freedom and flexibility have been acquired, nothing more is needed as a rule than to tell him what not to do; certainly not to give him a cut-and-dried pattern to copy. Those who are likely to perform in Greek tragedies should of course practise Greek movements, and those who are going to act in Shakespeare, particularly if they are 'cramped' and modern in their action, may be advised to take up a study of 'mime', or even to study gesture as such. On no account, however, should such work be undertaken until the body has been trained and rendered flexible and balanced. Sometimes it is not even wise for a student to take up dancing, and still less fencing, at the commencement of his training. There may be some muscle weakness that makes it desirable for him to go through a careful course of physical culture first, contemporaneously with the training of his voice, that will give a balanced, equal education to the entire body. Only when this is accomplished should dancing and fencing be taken up, and then, finally, the study of movement. Never, however, should there be any planning out or formalizing of gesture in the actual performance of a part. Never should a gesture

be made consciously when acting. 'Preparation' for a movement is the death-blow to reality. Gesture should be spontaneous and should appear inevitable—by which I do not of course mean that type of loose spontaneity which would permit of constant variations in performances of the same part. If a gesture be really the spontaneous outcome of the emotion that is being expressed, that gesture and no other will be the right one. Just as Kean studied and timed his moves and gestures to a hairbreadth, and never altered them once he got them to his satisfaction, so was it with those apparently spontaneous actors, Louis Calvert and Sir Charles Hawtrey. They 'tried out' their moves again and again, and timed them. What they had finally settled remained unaltered throughout the run of a play. Yet to the audience the effect was so spontaneous that it might only that moment have been conceived.

A student's movements and gestures in the rehearsal of a part may—and probably will—need criticism, and he will probably require to be shown what mistake he is making; but that is a very different thing from their being taught parrot-wise. Indeed, neither student nor full-fledged actor should be occupied with any thought of gesture at rehearsals, still less during performance. The only movements that should be consciously worked at and legislated for whilst rehearsing are fights and combined action of 'crowds' or principals, when gestures may possibly have to be planned by the producer. But this is another matter, and the need for such drilling is self-evident.

During the period of the physical part of training nothing can be so valuable, so profoundly stimulative and educative, as the study of Greek statuary, and in my opinion this should

always form part of the curriculum of the dramatic student. Such study may be the 'open sesame' to the imprisoned creative faculty.

We English show so little of what we feel in face and gesture, it being part of our code to suppress every sign of emotion, that a faithful copy of ourselves reproduced on the stage would be totally ineffective; consequently the facial expression, body-poise and gesture *indicative* of emotion must be studied and the *means of physical expression of it* practised until it becomes apparently spontaneous and perfectly natural.

When I say 'the means of physical expression' must be practised I refer to the training of the entire body and rendering it plastic, obedient, responsive, and balanced. The actor who has studied the models for all time that we find in Greek statuary and beautiful pictures will make, spontaneously, the right movement, the right gesture. Nor need he fear that he will produce a 'heroic' movement in, say, a modern comedy; for a sense of the appropriate will have been developed by such study. Duse never stepped outside the picture in a modern play though she drew all her inspiration for movement from the Greek.

This is borne out by Komisarjevsky, most modern of producers, who says: 'I usually advise my students to do healthy gymnastic exercises, to play games, and study pictures and sculpture, but never to employ gestures and poses mechanically.'

It is precisely because of the national aversion from the showing of emotion that prolonged training of body and voice and study of classic models is needed, and that infinite tact and discretion are required at the hands of teacher

and producer in criticizing. The producer seldom realizes what torture of self-consciousness actors often suffer in the attempt to secure effects during rehearsal that only lack of mastery of the physical means of expression is preventing.

Even at the eleventh hour these might be achieved, without wrecking the *morale*, with the aid and co-operation of instruction by an expert *away from rehearsals*. I am not suggesting that even then 'coaching' should be resorted to; that is, the getting an actor to 'copy' the movement which is desired. The cause for the inability to produce the right effect must be sought. If it is not due to lack of intelligence it can probably be traced to a 'block' in the physical mechanism. This can usually be overcome by suitable exercises, which, with an explanation of the dramatic needs, will in nine cases out of ten remove the difficulty.

The actor should never lose sight of the fact that obedience to fundamental principles in training results in ultimate freedom of expression.

CHAPTER SIX

THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF PRESENT-DAY PHYSICAL CARRIAGE

I HAVE endeavoured to show in the previous chapters that correct proportions, together with flexibility and control of the entire body, are essential in the physical equipment of the actor. It is therefore serious to find that present-day habits of physical carriage, and even of much physical training, are prejudicial to their acquirement.

Let us consider the prevailing type of physical carriage. What do we see everywhere?

A tendency to flat foot, feet widely turned out, knock knees, bent knees, weakness of the abdominal muscles with consequent protrusion below the belt, flat chests, round backs, stretched, weak muscles at the base of the back of the neck, resulting in an ugly bulge, with, towards middle age, frequently a considerable deposit of fat there, and as a result of the weak muscles a badly-carried head and outstretched chin.

These points can be seen by the untrained eye. The trained eye will detect a good deal more: superficial breathing, wrong weight-distribution, lack of poise and elasticity, and considerable prevalence of slight spinal curvature. In addition to the prejudicial effect of the last-named upon breathing, which I have dealt with in the previous chapter, it will be evident on consideration that, besides being ugly, a body that has 'dropped' permanently on one side must necessarily suffer loss of poise and spring.

But there is another form of curvature, less obvious to the

untrained eye, which is even more prejudicial to the actor than a lateral curvature, and which is still more prevalent.

It is known as Lordosis, and is an over-accentuation of the curve in the lower dorsal and upper lumbar region. It causes flat chest, superficial breathing, bad carriage of head, and bulging of the abdomen. Associated with it are wrong weight-distribution, contracted hamstrings, and weak knees.

Wrong weight-distribution is usually the initial cause of the lordosis, but the whole thing soon becomes a vicious circle, each fault acting and reacting upon the other, till it frequently is difficult to disentangle cause and effect. A lateral curvature may sometimes be 'compensated'; a lordosis never, unless by the acquirement of another defect in the shape of what may bluntly be termed 'a hump'!

Lordosis also affects the breath-control, because the sunken upper chest makes free expansion of the bottom of the lungs impossible, and cramps and puts out of action the diaphragm and the lower costal muscles; it impedes free laryngeal movement, consequently limiting pitch and preventing good voice-work; it throws the balance of the whole body out of gear, impairs flexibility, and makes speed practically impossible.

Look at the heels of a man's boots, and if you find them worn down at the back, slightly towards the outer side, you may know at once that his weight-distribution is wrong, i.e. he is standing and walking on his heels, and that many, if not all, the evils I have named will be present.

In women who wear high heels a curious anomaly is presented. It might be supposed that the high heel would necessarily throw the weight forward, but the exact oppo-

site is the case. The angle is so unnatural that the body is perforce tilted backwards in the hip-joint and the knees kept incessantly bent. This causes—by reason of the heel of the foot being maintained immovably at a considerable distance from the ground—shortening of the hamstrings and stretching and weakening of the muscles of the abdominal walls. The result is frequently a displacement of internal organs, contraction of the pectoral muscles, and such stretching of the shoulder muscles, with consequent 'round shoulders', that if the head could be turned completely round so as to face in the opposite direction we might say: 'What a splendid chest!' Such a person will be unable to touch the floor without bending the knees. Women who have a lordosis very seldom stand with the weight back on both heels simultaneously. This is found chiefly in men, as will be realized when the typical 'hearthrug position', with feet apart, widely turned out, and weight back, is recalled. In women the weight usually falls on one foot, and the knee of the other one is advanced and bent. If the weight be always on the *same* foot a lateral curvature will soon develop in addition.

So that whether we have the high heel of the woman or the low heel of the man, we shall find that the weight tends to be on the heel instead of the ball of the foot. This results in a thickened, inelastic tendon of Achilles and a clumsy, unduly large heel, with a tendency to swollen ankles. Even when low heels are worn we often find the same fault—unless the feet have been trained and the habit formed of the weight being carried forward.

It will be evident on reviewing these facts that this all-too-common habit must be especially prejudicial to the actor

because it upsets the balance of the whole body and makes anything like real elasticity and freedom of movement impossible.

It is deplorable to see the bent knees that are displayed in the 'classics'. It is enough to make the great old actors rise up and walk, Banquo-like, amongst us, demonstrating how to move and stand in Shakespeare.

I once witnessed a performance of one of the Tragedies in which only one person in the entire company had straight knees, and he was an actor of the 'old school'. All the others stood first upon one leg and then upon the other, always with one knee weakly, wamblingly bent. Had one not seen their faces, or known otherwise, one would have thought that most of them were old men.

The feet are the most important factor in balance; if they are maintained in a rigid position, as must be the case either with high heels, or with the weight at the back and outer edges of low heels, there can be no 'play' of the tendons, no alternation of contracting and relaxing.

What may be termed 'foot work', upon which all freedom of movement must necessarily be dependent, is practically non-existent nowadays except in those who have been trained to dance and exercise barefoot with the weight on the balls of the feet.

The evil commences in early childhood. Little children are put into shoes of which the soles are so inflexible that it is impossible to bend them. Very soon they walk flat-footedly, and never learn to use the muscles of the instep.

Watch the lithe activity of the child's naked feet; see the ripple of the muscles, their beautiful freedom and elasticity, the way the toes grip the ground, their independence of

movement—especially of the big toe—and their capacity to pick objects up; and then look at the flat, dull immobility, the lifelessness of the same feet after they have been encased in shoes. Boys and girls of older growth are put into 'stout' boots and shoes that will stand hard wear. Take up their footgear and try to bend the soles, and you will realize that the feet will soon give up any attempt to move them. Moreover, the sole seldom touches the arch of the instep, which consequently has no support, and this, combined with the weight of the boot or shoe, soon breaks down the arch. It is rare that any attention is given to fitting the arch of the instep in childhood and early youth. When adult years are reached and a 'smart' shoe is desired the mischief is done, and high heels or instep 'supports' are resorted to.

I once demonstrated what the foot can do, if given the chance to mould a sole to it. I had condemned certain thick, rigid, leather sandals in which some students were making a very poor attempt at 'Greek' movements. They admitted that it was extremely hard work and that their feet ached, but had attributed it to the change from wearing heels. I soaked a pair of the sandals in water until they were quite soft, and then walked, exercised, and danced in them till they were dry. When I took them off they were modelled to my feet. They had well-arched insteps instead of the flat atrocities in which the unfortunate students had been labouring and aching, and were perfectly comfortable. Look at the boots of our growing boys and girls with this in mind and see which is likely to be moulded—the foot or the footgear.

But even right footgear will be of no avail if the mistake

be made of turning the toes out, for this must, by throwing the weight back on the heels, inevitably *cause* many of the evils described.

Most adults of the present time were taught in childhood to turn their toes out to an angle of 45 degrees. This most mistaken method is being rapidly discarded and more rational instruction given. Indeed, a great change is coming about in the training of the body, particularly in girls' schools. There is still much to be desired in boys' schools, where the special training for the various sports takes place of precedence, and where neither drill nor general standards of 'carriage' have established any connexion between suppleness of the body as a whole, still less with ideals of grace and beauty. Moreover—and this is an important point which should not be lost sight of—even where 'educative' gymnastics are carried out systematically they are regarded by the pupils (though I think this applies very much more to boys than to girls) as 'lessons'—and boring ones at that—which have no bearing upon their everyday life.

How often does one not hear the remark: 'I hate drill—"Gym" bores me stiff.'

The consequence is that the schoolboy slouches; indeed, he seems to consider it 'bad form' to do otherwise.

Nevertheless, here, too, there are many hopeful signs, and if the stupid idea could be expelled that a good carriage is 'affected' we should soon see a vast change.

The youth of the present time have immense advantages not only in improved methods of physical instruction but in their clothing, which favours freedom of movement. But careless habits may neutralize these advantages. Bad positions in standing and sitting may, and do, interfere with

deep breathing, and cause postural curvatures of the spine. The type of chair used at meals or when writing or studying is usually an abomination. It gives no more support to the back than the shoe of our youth gives to the instep, with the result that the muscles of a growing child cannot maintain a good position. Consequently the habit is formed at an early age of 'falling all of a heap', a habit which is apt to remain through life, and which, besides weakening the spinal muscles and interfering with breathing, makes ease of movement and easy 'stance'—both so important to the actor—impossible.

Fortunately, we have not to contend at the present time with the handicap to breathing of the corset, either in men or women. Incredible as it seems, corsets were at one time worn by many men to meet the exigencies of perfect fit demanded by the frock coat! They must have had a considerable vogue, or firms who made them would not have found it worth while to advertise them in the press to a quite considerable extent. As for women! Waists laced in from four to ten inches less than their normal size were of common occurrence.

I remember a very pretty young 'leading lady' being sent to my father by her manager because she was inaudible beyond the first few rows of the stalls. Her waist had been compressed from 26 to *16 inches*, making it impossible for her to get enough breath to produce anything adequate in the way of tone. She professed herself thoroughly convinced as to the evil effect of the tight-lacing upon her voice, but said that it would cost her her position in the theatre if she 'let her waist out', asserting that her manager insisted on small waists. My father replied that she would have to

choose between her waist and her voice, and she assured him pathetically that she had no option in the matter.

On meeting her manager subsequently my father expressed regret that his insistence in this respect should stand in the way of her weakness of voice being remedied. Then the amusing fact came to light that this had been pure fiction, behind which she had sheltered her firm determination not to add to the measurement of her waist by a single inch!

Such an attitude typified the conventionality that choked the art of acting at that time. The emergence into the freedom, mental and physical, that now prevails gives the artist a chance such as has not existed for many a year.

In casting aside the trammels of bones and buckram, however, good carriage has tended to be discarded as though it were a relic of Victorian stiffness and primness, and there is a risk of mistaking sloppiness for freedom. Balance is impossible without control; elasticity must have something firm to act and react from. Resonance demands a sounding-board. None of these essentials are possible without muscle-training of a very high order, and should on no account be confused with the rigidity and lack of responsiveness of weak, untrained muscles.

It is ever thus with reform. We are liable at first to spring too far in the opposite direction. In abolishing restrictions a tendency has manifested itself to slouch, to be flat-chested, bulgy below the waist, and bent of knee. To hold ourselves erect, with high head, well-carried chest, taut abdominal muscles, and firm knees, is tacitly voted 'affected'. Fatal and most effectually deterrent epithet!

A pretty young actress was sent to me for correction of inaudibility. Her diction proved to be unusually good, but

her voice did not 'carry'. This turned out to be due to lack of resonance, caused by superficial breathing, and 'slack' sounding-board, i.e. upper part of chest. In exact proportion to the collapsed upper chest were her 'round shoulders', bulging abdomen, and large hips. The last-named she was trying to remedy with a tight abdominal belt, which was making matters rapidly worse by preventing her from using her diaphragm and the muscles of the abdomen. Seen from behind she looked quite middle-aged.

I made her take off the corset ('belt' is the euphemistic term employed nowadays), told her she must discard her high-heeled shoes, gave her deep-breathing exercises, stretched the unduly short hamstrings, mobilized feet and trunk, and then set her to work on Breathing Gymnastics. Will it be believed that she utterly declined to practise the latter, on the ground that they would 'make her chest stick out'! She could not see that the abdominal 'bulge' which was such a worry to her, and which she was trying to suppress by wearing a tight belt, was due to the sunken chest. Again history repeated itself. She preferred to keep her toneless voice rather than carry her chest properly!

A word of warning is needed against the wearing of abdominal supports. In some few cases, for medical reasons, they may be necessary, but for the most part they should not be used. They destroy freedom and spontaneity of movement and intensify the very muscle weakness and superfluity of adipose tissue that they are supposed to correct. Give a muscle permanent support and it will abandon its proper function and gradually atrophy for want of work.

The extent to which the freedom of women's clothes at the present time is nullified by the wearing of abdominal

belts, and the evil effects therof, is not realized. In most cases the right kind of exercises will not only render this unnecessary but will reduce the 'bulge' below the waist, together with the circumference of the hips, and keep the figure and movements young and elastic.

Women's clothing, with the exception of abdominal supports and high heels, has never been so sensible and so charming. It offers no impediment to perfect freedom of movement, and it is a pity to minimize its advantages.

Men's clothing, on the other hand, is open to considerable criticism in the matter of weight and superfluity, and above all in regard to tight collars, which materially impede laryngeal freedom, and consequently interfere with vocal range. The soft collars which are now so much worn are infinitely worse than starched ones. The latter, even if they are high, usually stand slightly away from the neck, allowing air to circulate. But the soft ones set close to the throat and are pulled in by the knot of the tie, as waists used to be. Added to which the neck-band of the shirt is frequently too small. I have often seen a deep red depression where the collar stud has been pressed into the throat. A throat that is tightly bandaged in this manner will be relaxed and weak. But here all argument is vain. No considerations of heat, or comfort, or professional efficiency will prevail against the fetish of conventionality in men's attire. I have many times in the past vanquished tight-lacing, but a man's tight collars rarely, if ever. This is strange in view of the meticulous insistence upon the 'correct' clothes for sports, and the care that is taken of the implement employed in pursuit of the said sport. What attention is lavished upon the car, the gun, the golf clubs, the racquet, the bat, and so forth! But

how often, if ever, is the question considered as to whether any particular form of clothing is 'correct'—let alone prejudicial—for freedom of movement on the stage; or whether habits of life, little personal indulgences, might have any adverse effect?

Art is a stern task-mistress. She exacts a severe apprenticeship and many sacrifices. No one who has studied the matter can contend for one moment that these are offered up to-day as they were in the past. When they are, great actors will again be with us.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ACTOR'S VOICE

HAMLET. Will you play upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN. My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET. . . . Govern these ventages . . . give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most excellent music. Look you, these are the stops.

GUILDENSTERN. But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill.

HAMLET. . . . There is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak.

I COULD wish it were as impossible for the actor to speak in public without proper instruction and training in the use and management of the voice, in the 'governing of the ventages', the 'giving it breath', and managing 'the stops' so that it shall 'discourse most excellent music', as it is impossible to play upon a pipe, or perform upon any instrument, without instruction and practice. The twofold assumption that it is possible to speak on the stage as in private life, and that any attempt to produce purer tone, clearer enunciation, and more resonance than in ordinary conversation will destroy reality and naturalness is wrecking the art of acting, rendering the actor inaudible, and is, without doubt, a potent deterrent to theatre-going.

At no period of which we have any record has there been such imperative need for serious voice-training for all public speakers, and in particular for the actor as at the present time, because, as I shall presently show, the prevailing

slovenly speech habits make good tone, audibility, and carrying-power little short of impossible.

Here is corroboration from two unimpeachable authorities. Ellen Terry, in a letter of appreciation to Louis Calvert on his admirable book, *Problems of the Actor*, said:

'*Speech* is becoming dangerously absent on the stage. So few trouble nowadays to make themselves intelligible on the stage—and off it!'

Dr. Bridges, in *English Pronunciation*, said:

'Degradation of speech has no limit but its own actual intelligibility. Decay is always pushing in, because of the laziness of the speaker, who will take no more trouble than is necessary . . . When his negligence reaches the point where he becomes unintelligible to his hearer, he has to repeat what he has said; and the fact that it is more trouble to speak twice than once is what practically fixes the limit of degradation.'

Now it is obvious that the actor cannot be asked to repeat what the audience is unable to hear. Sporadic adjurations to 'speak up' are futile, and are at once hushed down, either as unseemly or because they annoy and interfere with the limited number who are near enough to hear. The result is that productions become more and more like the silent film, making their chief appeal to the eye through mounting, dresses, and the physical 'type' and good looks of the actor.

Mr. J. T. Grein, complaining of 'the indistinct mumbling' which even in the stalls had rendered large portions of the dialogue inaudible in a production of considerable importance, made the excellent suggestion:

'If only our actors would for the nonce take our places and realize what it means to prick up eager ears and receive formless sounds for one's pains!'

Dr. Bridges pointed out that when a speaker is asked to repeat something that has been too indistinctly uttered to be understood 'he will when repeating it probably make some attempt to amend his previous mispronunciation, *and there is no knowing what he may then do.*'

I have italicized the concluding remark, because it throws a flood of light upon what happens to the actor who is adjured by the producer during rehearsals to 'speak up', to 'keep it up', to get a certain word 'over', to speak more quickly, and so on. As Dr. Bridges most significantly said, there is no knowing what he may then do. Lacking control of the muscles of breath, voice, and enunciation, instead of their producing automatically the effect required by the sense of the words and the drama of the situation, efforts are made to produce the desired effect objectively, to 'copy' something patterned by the producer. The result in most cases is to rob the actor of spontaneity, and to cause artificiality and unreality.

Precisely the same thing occurs from 'elocution' lessons, that is, from the attempt to interpret, to render, to express the scene, character and emotion of parts before vocal technique has been mastered. Voice-training should come first, at any rate, until a sufficient proficiency has been attained. If the mechanism of breath and voice be not under control and functioning correctly before the study of parts is commenced, not only will spontaneity be impossible, but correction of faults by the teacher will often *cause* stilted delivery. Nor should voice work be dropped when the study of parts and rehearsal classes commence. It should be continued as an integral part of training, and the habit formed of regular, systematic practice throughout the career.

Actors are often misled as to the need for training the voice, and for daily practice, by the fact that there are undoubtedly fine speaking voices that are 'born', not made. But this should only be regarded as part of the necessary equipment.

Colley Cibber said: 'So strong, so very near indispensible, is that one article of voice in the forming of a good tragedian, that an actor may want any other qualification whatsoever, and yet have a better chance for applause than he will ever have, with all the skill in the world, if his voice is not equal to it.'

But the possession of this 'indispensible thing' is no argument for not training it and bringing it under control, any more than the possession of an aptitude for any art exempts a person from working at and mastering its technique.

Who would dream of trying to paint before he had learned to draw? Or of attempting to play pieces on the piano or violin, or any other instrument, without first mastering technique? Who would be so rash as to commence the study of operatic roles before his voice had been trained? Or of ceasing to work at his technique when the stage of performance had been reached? No great executive artist would dream of such a thing.

It was once said envyingly to Joachim, that consummate master of technique:

'I suppose *you* do not need to practise as we lesser folk do?'

To which he replied impressively:

'Never think practice can be dispensed with by anyone. If I were to omit my practice for one day I should notice the difference in my playing; if I were to omit it for two days my

friends would notice the difference; if I were to omit it for three days the public would notice the difference.'

Every art has its underlying science of technique. Why should the actor, alone of all performers, think it unnecessary to master his instrument?

That here and there great natural gifts and aptitude would seem to render it unnecessary in no way affects the argument. I say 'would seem' advisedly, because when we come to inquire into it we often find that artists who are quoted as heaven-born, and as owing nothing to training, have in point of fact had serious training or experience of some kind which has resulted in flexibility and mastery of technique; as for example, having studied singing, ballet dancing, coming of a family of actors, acting from childhood, and so on. When all such possibilities have been ruled out we shall find that they are rare exceptions, and one does not generalize from exceptions.

Not only does the actor limit himself, becoming a 'type', a mere marionette, but he runs a grave risk of injuring his voice if he use it in public without proper training.

It is amazing that the actor, whose *instrument* is the voice, should think it possible to embark on his profession without training it, without knowledge of its function or of how to take care of it; for the voice is an instrument of miraculous delicacy and complexity which may be irretrievably damaged by misuse. Wrong breathing, for instance, may not only make audibility impossible, but may, and frequently does, actually injure the vocal cords and congest the throat. Indeed, wrong breathing is at the root of most vocal and of very many physical ills. Yet even an elementary knowledge on the subject is frequently completely lacking.

For instance, finding every sign of throat-strain in an actor who came to consult me about his voice, I commenced to explain the action of the vocal cords to him, when he interrupted with:

'Oh, I know all about them. They are little things like harp strings, that go down each side of the neck.'

This astounding remark at once betrayed not only his complete ignorance of the nature and function of the vocal cords, but also the fact that he was forcing his voice, for the sensations that gave rise to this misconception were caused by strain.

An even more preposterously erroneous idea was disclosed by an actor who was suffering from lung trouble. A friend went to visit him, and in answer to the inquiry how he was, the actor replied in a mournful, weak, husky voice:

'Very bad. The doctor says my left lung is practically gone, but, thank Heaven!'—and here he thumped the right side of his chest reassuringly and trolled out in a ringing tone—'the right lung is as sound as a bell.'

He evidently thought it possible to speak from one or other lung at will!

Another erroneous idea is that vowels are formed in the larynx. This may be a contributory factor in the failure to open the mouth adequately and to effect the readjustments in its shape by which alone the various vowel sounds are made.

Yet another misapprehension is the very commonly accepted view that the voice in order to be resonant must be directed into the nose. Sarah Bernhardt, for instance, in her book *The Art of the Theatre* says:

'For a voice to be really complete it must be slightly nasal.'

This view is by no means confined to France, where there is some justification for it owing to nasal sounds being an integral part of the language, but it is increasingly held in England, instruction constantly being given to singers and speakers to 'direct the tone into the nose'.

I shall return to this theory in the practical manual for actors that I propose to bring out later on and shall deal with it fully, for underlying it is a profound truth which is of great importance to the voice-user; but lack of accurate knowledge on the subject, with a resultant confusing of cause and effect, frequently leads to this entirely erroneous deduction, and consequently to the acquirement of *nasal tone* instead of nasal resonance.

In no subject shall we see more unmistakably demonstrated the truth of the saying that 'a little learning is a dangerous thing' than in this of voice-production.

If we survey the extraordinary attempts that are made to define and describe the voice we shall realize that it must be an instrument presenting considerable elements of complexity and obscurity. It is usually regarded as a musical instrument, and has variously been compared with widely differing types of instrument. Galien likened it to a flute, Magendie to a hautboy, Despiney to a trombone, Diday to a hunting-horn, Savart to a bird-catcher's call, Biot to an organ pipe, Malgaigne to the little instrument of the Punch and Judy show, and Ferrein to a spinet or harpsichord. The vocal cords have been compared to violin strings, the breath to the bow, and the diaphragm and lower intercostal muscles, which together direct and control the breath, to the hand and arm of the player; but though the symbolism in this last comparison is quite good it is a moot point

whether it is wise to employ similes that are in conflict with facts. When the term 'cords' is used in relation to tone a picture is conjured up of something in the nature of violin strings, which are round and free everywhere except at each end, whereas modern science has demonstrated that the vocal 'cords' are not round, nor free, except at their inner edges. They are flat, wedged-shaped ledges of elastic tissue, forming an inherent part of the larynx, to the sides of which they are attached. The term 'ligaments' employed by my father in his works on vocal physiology is therefore much more accurate, and I shall consequently use it in these pages.

In silence the vocal ligaments are apart, somewhat like an open pair of scissors. Tone can only be formed when they are approximated and set into vibration by the breath as it impinges on them from below on its upward and outward passage from the lungs. So it is clear that in its fundamental aspect the voice is more like a reed instrument than a stringed instrument, because tone is, as in the reed instrument, the result of the reeds, or vocal ligaments, being thrown into vibration by the medium of the breath.

Obviously, if the voice can be compared to such a variety of instruments it must present considerable elements of complexity. And so indeed it does. No man-made instrument can compare with the wonder of its delicate structure and function. The more we study it the more do we marvel at the intricacy and subtle co-ordinations of the muscle work that go to produce speech or song.

What a miracle that this wonderful instrument, capable of wide range of pitch, subtle gradations of tone-colour and inflection, of swell and diminution, of flexibility, power, delicacy, throb, intensity, gaiety, pathos, is part of the

human body, influenced for good or ill by our bodily habits, capable of being made or marred, developed, and improved almost beyond recognition, in proportion as we do or do not bring commonsense, hygiene, knowledge, training, and control to bear upon it!

A man who wishes to become a professional violinist will obtain the best instruction and the finest violin that he can afford, and will take great care of his fiddle. But the voice-user has no element of choice of his instrument. It is built up within him, and he frequently does not realize till considerable harm has been done, possibly when it is too late to remedy matters, that it is affected by whatever affects his health and bodily well-being, and that many things which are permissible to others should be 'taboo' to him.

A violinist may give just as good a performance if he is suffering from a cold or an attack of indigestion. He can have his fiddle put away carefully at home if he is going to indulge in some amusement that would be detrimental to it. The voice-user's instrument is ever with him, and the expression of his art may be rendered impossible by some minor ailment, or some form of amusement that would not in any way affect performance upon a violin or piano.

Singers usually have more knowledge as to what is prejudicial to the voice. It is not brought home to speakers in the same way, and for the most part they know singularly little about its mechanism, its training, or the care of it. The singer is trained as the speaker very rarely is, and the singing voice shows the effect more obviously of adverse influences. Moreover, the singer is exhorted from the commencement of his studies to listen to himself critically, and he soon learns what affects his tone for good or ill. His ear is developed

and trained in a way that is undreamt of for the most part in the training of the speaking voice.

Complex, however, as is the vocal mechanism, there is no longer any need to hazard wild guesses as to its nature, or to trust to luck and unguided instinct in its use. We now have what really may be said to be exact knowledge on the subject.

First, there is knowledge of the anatomy through dissection. My father, for instance, dissected a wind-pipe and larynx, and with a minute pair of bellows caused the dead ligaments to produce sounds and even scales. To any who question the value of such an experiment I would say that besides the knowledge gained of the *structure*, a knowledge of *function* was acquired, for the fact emerged unmistakably that the ligaments are to all practical purposes passive agents. They are 'played on' by the breath. Changes of pitch are brought about by varying degrees of breath-pressure, and the sound resulting from the tone-producing elements when divorced from the resonators is so poor and weak as hardly to be recognizable as the human voice. It proves besides the fallacy of the idea that vowels are formed in the larynx, a particularly unfortunate theory to postulate for English speakers, who are likely to be encouraged thereby in their tendency to immobility of mouth. The fallacy of this theory is further proved by the fact that it is possible to change from one to another of all the vowels in succession by readjustments of the mouth and tongue whilst maintaining one note; while, on the other hand, changes of pitch, say the singing of a scale, can be carried out while the mouth is maintained in the position of one vowel. (The minute readjustments of the mouth-positions to changes of pitch

which lie close together are, in relation to the point under discussion, negligible.)

Those who remain unconvinced may perhaps be led to change their opinion after reading the description in *The Proceedings of the Royal Society*, vol. cii, 1923, and vol. cvi, 1924, of some experiments by Sir Richard Paget in producing 'synthetic' vowels. He devised an apparatus which consisted of a series of double resonators of hour-glass form, having an artificial larynx at one end, and an opening, or 'mouth', at the other, the latter being a cavity, not a tube. There is a partial obstruction, like the stop of a photographic camera, between the resonators, and it was found that by varying the position of the stop and the size of the aperture a succession of different vowels could be produced. The description of these experiments is highly interesting and suggestive, and should open the way to a better understanding of the human functions in this respect. In the human mouth the vocal cavity is divided into two resonators by the *tongue*, one being the space behind the tongue and the other the space in front of it. Changes from one vowel to another are the result of readjustments of tongue, cheeks, and lips, which can be carried out while the same pitch is maintained.

It will thus be evident that as changes of pitch are the result of changes in tension and adjustment of the vocal ligaments, brought about by breath-pressure, and vowels and consonants the result of readjustments of tongue and mouth, a high degree of flexibility and agility of all these parts must be essential for pure speech, audibility, and carrying-power, and the pernicious, stultifying effect of modern slovenly speech habits will be realized. It will also

be understood why the theory that vowels are formed in the larynx is so peculiarly unfortunate, and why the all-too-common direction to voice-users, both singers and speakers, to keep the tongue flat, so disastrous. It *must* interfere with purity of vowels and distinctness of articulation, besides affecting pitch, by reason of its connexion with the larynx. This is again one of those dangerous half-truths which may be the cause of so much harm. Control and rigidity are not synonymous. A high degree of flexibility, adjustability, and control of the tongue is essential, but this is quite a different matter from any attempt at 'keeping it flat'.

Few things have been of such far-reaching importance and value in the investigation of the mechanism of voice as the invention of the laryngoscope, by means of which the living organism can be observed in the production of tone. Obviously no 'synthetic' apparatus, however ingenious, can be as convincing as a demonstration of the human apparatus at work. We can by means of the laryngoscope actually see the readjustments of the vocal ligaments in changes of pitch and in the production of different registers, and we can also *see* what happens in right and wrong methods of attack.

It is my custom to demonstrate these points to all who study with me, for it is a sure way to prevent forcing. No one can fail to be impressed by the delicacy of the vocal ligaments. The violence with which they are 'clashed' together in the forced attack that is so often employed, under the mistaken idea that this is the way to obtain precision, can be clearly seen. The falsity and danger thereof are so patent that anyone who has seen it will speedily discard it and will undertake the necessary practice for the acquirement of that exact co-ordination of the breath and

the closing muscles of the glottis by which alone the neat, decisive, yet gentle approximation may be secured which results in correct attack of tone. Nor does this lead to 'consciousness' of the vocal ligaments. Their working can justly be compared to machinery, which we are not conscious of when all is in proper working order. We only become aware of the working of machinery, and of our vocal ligaments, and indeed of the mechanism of voice in general *if anything be amiss*. If this fact were impressed upon voice-users of all kinds much error and subsequent misery and failure would be averted.

Another gain of incalculable value afforded by the progress of modern science is that the Röntgen rays have settled once and for all disputes on the subject of breathing. I believe I was the first person to 'illuminate' the living human being by their means in order to observe the action of breathing in relation to voice. I obtained skiagrams of the right and the wrong way to breathe.[1] They show a subject before taking breath; then after breathing by the combined action of the diaphragm and the lower intercostal muscles; and then the same subject after taking breath by raising the upper part of the chest. Three photographs of my throat are also given in this book, one with the soft palate raised in correct adjustment for the passage of the voice, another with soft palate hanging down as is the case in nasal tone, and the third with contracted pillars of the fauces in throaty tone. I always demonstrate this to those who study with me, and also the right and wrong adjustments of mouth for the vowel sounds. In this way eye and ear combine, and the student, who can rarely judge his tone

[1] See *Singers' Difficulties*, by Kate Emil-Behnke (Cassell).

in the early stages of study, *sees* what to avoid and what to work for. Ear gradually develops, and the two faculties 'check' and corroborate each other.

It is of the greatest assistance to students if the teacher demonstrate the *wrong* as well as the right thing. Flawless technique, whether the result of training and long years of work, or whether that rare thing a natural attribute, can seldom if ever be copied by the untrained person. Eye and ear can, however, perceive the difference between good or bad. When certain faults in breathing, adjustment of throat or mouth, are explained and demonstrated to the *eye* as being the cause of the bad tone that the ear apprehends, there is something tangible to grasp, and in the endeavour to avoid these conditions a big step has been made towards acquiring good tone and clear enunciation. Moreover, it is not sufficiently realized that the attempt on the part of the untrained to copy a technique which is the outcome of long years of work is a potent cause of forcing.

It is impossible to deal with technique in detail in such a book as this. My present object is to show the extent to which authorities are agreed that fundamental training of the voice is of paramount importance to the actor. Formerly there was considerable difference of opinion as to the best method of procedure, but there should be no doubt now. Modern research has revealed the nature of the underlying science of the production of voice and the art of speaking, on which training should be based. Consequently the right training must as surely produce the desired result, given suitable material and due study and practice on the part of the student, as, say, training for ballet, given the right material and the necessary work.

Unfortunately there still exists considerable prejudice against the study of voice-production by the actor—a prejudice which is entirely without foundation, due partly to its being confounded with elocution, and partly to superficial study.

It is too often lost sight of, or not realized, that voice is the result of muscular action and, moreover, of the co-ordination of a large number of muscles of varying types of action. Muscle-training and co-ordination can neither be omitted nor scamped. If they are, discomfort and self-consciousness will certainly be the result, and it is precisely this which leads so many to think that the study of voice-production makes 'natural' acting impossible. To speak naturally on the stage so that every word shall be heard and yet the actor shall *appear* to be speaking as in a drawing-room is the most difficult thing in the entire range of dramatic art and requires the highest degree of perfection of technique, a fact which has usually been fully realized by actors noted for 'naturalness' and effectiveness. Two outstanding examples of this were Charles Hawtrey and Louis Calvert.

Many who saw Hawtrey as 'Ambrose Applejohn' were amazed to find what vocal power he possessed, having been accustomed to hear him utter the casual dialogue of light, typical modern plays with a reality that suggested that it was actually being spoken in a drawing-room—and a small one at that—and yet with a carrying-power that resulted in every word being heard in all parts of the theatre. It was an axiom of Hawtrey's in 'producing' that the actor should imagine that he actually was in a drawing-room, one wall of which—the one between themselves and the audience—had

been removed without his being aware of it. But he was instant in admonishing any member of the company who did not speak so that every word could be heard. And that he realized that expert training in voice-production was needed to bring this about was evidenced by the frequency with which he sent young actors and actresses to me, often paying for the lessons himself.

Hawtrey worked at his lines in a way that would have surprised those who thought that he was always 'just himself'. His apparent spontaneity and complete naturalness were the outcome of immense thought and work. He would speak a line again and again, and yet again, trying out different inflections until he got the rendering that satisfied him. Once he had it he never altered it by a fraction, however long he played a part. Yet to the end of the run every word sounded as natural as if he were speaking it for the first time.

So was it with Louis Calvert.

All who remember him in modern work will recall his mastery of technique, and the unerring certainty and easy naturalness with which his lightest utterance carried. An outstanding demonstration of this was his wonderful, *apparently* spontaneous and unstudied performance of the waiter in 'You never can tell'. But every detail, every intonation and every movement had been thought out and rehearsed till they were automatic. Then they never varied. Yet they always appeared spontaneous and 'unstudied'.

An artist who does not produce the effect of spontaneity has failed. The greater the technique the more easily will the effect of spontaneity be produced.

Calvert fully appreciated the importance of serious voice-

training. Speaking of the art of being natural in his admirable book *Problems of the Actor* he says:

'We may say that our purpose is not to speak naturally on the stage, but to make people think we are speaking naturally, and this comes as a result of study and hard work.'

I have quoted Stanislavsky earlier in these pages on this ever-present paradox. Calvert alludes to it in almost the same words:

'The beginner', he says, 'is often told not to strain and shout, but to speak "naturally", and then when he does speak naturally he is told he cannot be heard. This is a baffling paradox, and one which everyone who takes up stage work is likely to meet sooner or later. As a matter of fact, *the natural speaking voice is of little or no use on the stage*, and neither is the shout. The secret of it is that a man should so train his voice that he has the range and pitch that is necessary, but also the technique and the control which enable him to *seem* to speak naturally. If we are to be good actors we *must train the voice*, and study its use, with the determination to make it the best instrument it is capable of becoming.'

These pregnant words by one who was a master of his profession should be pondered on and taken to heart by all those who intend to become actors.

Attention may also be drawn to his warning against acquiring a mere smattering of voice-production. He says:

'Often one is tempted to stop half-way; to develop the voice just sufficiently to pass muster and secure engagements, but this seems most short-sighted. The time is sure to come when the serious worker feels keenly the handicap of a half-trained voice; when he realizes that, because of his early

neglect of this vital part of his equipment, he is unable to reach the position to which his other proved qualities entitle him.'

The serious worker who has realized his limitations in this respect may with the aid of scientific voice-production, combined with perseverance, determination, and hard work, overcome them. But unfortunately many do not realize that lack of success is in any way due to these shortcomings.

It is possible that Duse might never have achieved her unique position had she not, by determination and hard work, conquered serious vocal limitations. Her biographer, Jeanne Bordeux, says in *The Story of Her Life*:

'In her youth the voice was thin, with little resource; "short" for the outcry, the low notes hard, not well-placed, and slightly nasal.'

Salvini said of her, even after her genius had met with recognition:

'It is a pity that her external qualities, *especially the short range of voice*, oblige her to keep to a limited répertoire.'

But as soon as Duse became conscious of her vocal defects she began, her biographer tells us, 'a discipline that rendered her voice smooth, sweet and penetrating: light as a bird's singing; note after note coloured by hope, doubt, fear, exultation; with the ability to plunge suddenly into deeper tones that never failed to carry suffering upon their dark, slow wings.'

As time went on, the 'enchantment' of her voice was constantly alluded to, and Jeanne Bordeux says that it was of common occurrence that people spoke of 'feeling better for it'. Towards the end of her career it was written of her:

'Her enunciation is vibrantly clear; *she has mastered the art of throwing a whisper to the gallery.*'

I emphasize this because it was not, as so many thought, spontaneous, but was the outcome of deliberate striving.

So too was it in the case of Sarah Bernhardt. Her 'golden voice' was often thought to be a natural attribute; consequently it is instructive to read in her book, *The Art of the Theatre*, that she had had to work hard at it. It was far from promising in her early days of training, and she relates that her teacher, Provost, refused to allow her to leave the Conservatoire too soon. When she was ready to pass out from the point of view of dramatic performance and interpretation he considered that she *needed another year's study without tiring her voice.*

As time went on, and triumph succeeded triumph, she became more and more convinced that the entire art of the actor went for naught if it was not based upon the *most profound, fundamental training and control of the voice.* Her book abounds with remarks to this effect, of which the following is typical:

'The voice is the dramatic artist's most necessary instrument. It is the *voice* that fixes the attention of the public, and effects contact between the artist and the audience. It must have all the harmonies, grave, plaintive, vibrant, and metallic. A defective voice will always preclude an artist from achieving the complete development of his art, however intelligent he may be. He will be "up against" an intangible but a very real obstacle. The shrewdness of the actor may for a moment evade the difficulty, but his career will be confined to a special line of business.'

Her considered opinion was that of all the accomplish-

ments needed by the actor the art of speaking was the most difficult to acquire; so much so, said she, 'that many young artists relinquished the study altogether, *which is why great artists are so few*'.

Could anything be more striking than this statement by one of the world's greatest actresses that the training, through long, patient hard work, of the voice is the keystone, the *sine qua non* of the really great artist!

But Bernhardt never fell into the error of advising the cultivation of voice for the sake of voice. On the contrary, she warned students against such a danger. She said:

'A fine voice is often a baneful gift if the artist uses it only to produce sound.' She constantly cautioned them not to become enamoured of vocal effects.

Undoubtedly, the owner of a fine voice is too often tempted to display it, and to 'boom'. Without training, it is frequently impossible to modulate it, and when it is a gift that has not been paid for by hard work its owner constantly abuses it, and takes liberties with it.

Cases will be recalled where the possession of a fine voice has really been a curse. Through lack of knowledge of how to use and how to conserve it, it has taken unto itself wings and has vanished; or it has become raucous from ill-usage, leaving its owner so beggared, often at a period in his career when loss of youth makes knowledge and control of the physical mechanism essential, as to be much worse off than if he had started his career without such adventitious aid.

Naturally, the possession of a fine voice by an actor is not necessarily an adventitious aid. This only applies to its leading him to think that he can dispense with training. The voice is the actor's instrument. The finer it is the better

for the actor, provided it be trained and brought under perfect control, and kept in training by regular practice.

This was also Calvert's view. He says:

'No matter how much we know about the art of acting, we must depend most of all upon our *voice* to express it to others. It is our point of contact with the people who give us our rating as an artist. That is why it seems so strange that the study of proper voice-production is so ignored by actors of the present day. In the days of Kemble, Kean, Macready, Phelps, Charles Dillon, and the others, it was not so; the training of the voice was given first consideration. These old giants realized that they must depend upon their voice to carry them to greatness; they realized, from what they saw others do, that wonders could be accomplished by training; they devoted themselves to this great primary as a matter of course.'

It will be remembered that in the chapter on 'Acting Past and Present' I quoted case after case showing the supreme importance attached to voice-training by the great actors of the past. These remarks of Calvert's, than whom no one in recent times was more competent to judge, are contributory evidence of the highest value, and very especially in disposing of the idea which is so generally held at the present time that though serious voice-training may be needed for 'heroic' work it is unnecessary for light work. Those who hold this most mistaken idea forget, or are not aware, that work in vaudeville, which necessitates the lightest, most feathery touch, speed and variety, was considered the most valuable training by the old actors, and was in most cases deliberately undertaken prior to 'big' work. We find Calvert testifying to this. He says:

'It is on the vaudeville stage that we see what really can be accomplished by voice-training. It is there, regrettably enough, that we are more likely to find voices that are really trained.'

Corroboration of this comes also from Stanislavsky, who describes experiment after experiment of his own in interpretation, with incessant disappointment and failure to realize his conceptions. He had trouble throughout the greater part of his career with his voice. Even when rehearsing it frequently failed, and he became so hoarse that rehearsals had to be abandoned for several days at a time while he was being doctored. Speaking of playing 'Othello' he says:

'All this, fool that I was, I hoped to accomplish with the aid of intuition alone. Of course I was able to reach nothing more than insane strain, spiritual and physical impotence, and the squeezing of tragic emotion out of myself. There was no restraint, no control of the temperament, no placing of colour; there was only the strain of muscles, the violation of the entire organism.'

Finally he came to the conclusion that the whole secret of success in tragedy was in the voice, and he recounts that after all his searchings and strivings it was *only at the sunset* of his artistic career that he was led to 'the study of the voice, to its placement, to the nobility of sound and diction, to rhythmical, musical intonation, to a true view of the soul of vowels, consonants, words, phrases, sentences, and speech. *All this is demanded for a true understanding of dramatic art*'.

So he took up the study of *singing* again, and devised a system for 'placing the voice' for the drama, with the result, *not that his voice grew bigger*, but that it became easy to use.

He was then able to go right through a whole play without fatigue, which had made great demands on his vocal resources, in which, indeed, his voice had barely lasted through more than an act.

Precisely similar was Hermann Vezin's experience. Although he possessed a robust voice, considerable physical strength, and a particularly fine chest, he used even as a young man to become exhausted and hoarse before he had got through the performance of a leading Shakespearian part. Realizing as time went on that there was something wrong with the way he was using his voice he placed himself under my father, with the result that he was before long enabled to play two such colossal parts in one day as 'Othello' and 'Macbeth', and at the end his voice would be absolutely fresh and untired.

Vezin was not only a fine Shakespearian actor, but he was also the foremost Shakespearian teacher and authority of his time. He brought to his work single-minded enthusiasm and profound erudition. Many of the successful Shakespearian actors of to-day studied with him, and can testify to the value of his teaching.

He found again and again that those who worked with him were unable to reproduce what he showed them for want of training in the use of the voice, and he constantly sought my father's co-operation—with the same happy results as in his own case.

The experience of Vezin, Calvert, and Stanislavsky is identical. Each had run the gamut of all the emotions in his range of parts; each had found himself conditioned by difficulties of technique which had their origin in lack of instruction in voice-production; and each surmounted his

difficulties and found full expression of his art, after long years of struggle and strain and bitter artistic frustration, on taking up this neglected and vitally necessary study. Each was led thereby to urge the paramount need for the actor before all things to study voice-production, to subject all the muscles of breathing and of voice to as serious and fundamental a training as is undertaken by the performer on an instrument, or one who is going to be a ballet-dancer; for each, besides being a leading actor, was a teacher of eminence and a 'producer' too, and had found the same difficulties in those who came to them to study parts, and in actors in the plays they produced.

I have quoted these three great artists at some length, for their authority is unassailable. Their evidence is disinterested. They had no other motive than to help others from the depths of their own bitter experience to find a way out of such difficulties; nay, more, to show that many of them could be *prevented* by the right training at the right time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VOICE-PRODUCTION VERSUS ELOCUTION

IT is necessary to amplify my remarks on Voice-production and Elocution, for there exists much confusion on the subject. In the first place, we must define the terms, for they are used interchangeably, with a reaction upon the science of voice-training that is most unfortunate.

As I understand it, voice-production is the term applied to the scientific training of the muscles that are used in speech or song, accomplished by the practice of exercises based on the laws of physiology and knowledge of muscle action. It is to the actor what the training of the physical mechanism is to the pianist. The most favourable 'make' of hand and inherent flexibility will not enable finger and wrist work to be dispensed with. Hours of practice, day after day, over a long period of time, are needed before the student can even take up the study of pieces, let alone perform in public; and the practice must be kept up.

It is amazing that the need for similar training, and similar maintenance of practice, for the actor is not more generally recognized.

Compare the number of muscles used by the pianist with the number, complexity, and delicacy of those used by the actor: the muscles of respiration; the laryngeal muscles—of attack, pitch, continuity and flexibility; the muscles governing the soft palate—that little movable partition at the back of the throat that should readjust itself with every change of pitch, that is so potent for evil in the matter of obstructing free egress of the voice, and in causing nasal or throaty tone;

the tongue—that 'unruly member'—which also interferes with the free passage of the voice, causing vowels to be 'woolly' or impure, and consonants to be so imperfectly formed as to prevent clear articulation; the muscles of throat and jaw, cheeks and lips—usually rigid in the Briton (note the difference in the German and the Frenchman, who, though they have immense natural advantages and good national habits in this respect, go through, as I have mentioned elsewhere, a long technical training to bring their physical mechanism to the highest possible degree of perfection and control)—those muscles which are all-important in allowing free passage of tone, and which are the means whereby pure vowels are formed and the voice focused so that it 'carries', and the dilator muscles of the nasal passages —usually so inactive in the Englishman—and without which nasal resonance is impossible.

A formidable total, truly. And each set of muscles should be exercised separately and rendered flexible and obedient before any attempt is made to co-ordinate them. And, mind, we are now only discussing the voice. There is also the body, which is as much the actor's instrument as his voice, and which, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, must be trained and rendered flexible, strong, and obedient.

When we remember what a vast amount of work is required for the limited muscle-equipment of the pianist we shall be better able to estimate the training that the vastly bigger and more complicated physical medium of the actor must need. We are prepared for this in the case of singers, and it should be understood that the musculature of singer and speaker are identical and that the actor's voice

requires as comprehensive and extended a training as the singer's.

G. H. Lewes, referring to this in his book *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, said:

'While everyone understands that it is a primary requisite in a singer that he should not only have a voice, but know how to *sing*; very few seem to suspect that it is not less a primary requisite in an actor that he should know how to *speak*. The consequence is that very few actors do know how to speak.'

Now, the term 'elocution' does not connote the *training of the voice*. It means the art of effective speaking; i.e. of *delivery*. It denotes also eloquence, flow of words; but certainly not the acquirement of the underlying technique. If the actor is taught 'elocution' before his voice has been trained it is more than likely that he will never achieve good speech. The teacher of elocution is hardly to be blamed if he assume that the voice has already been trained and if he therefore take the student straight to the study of parts.

This course is sometimes pursued in the case of the possessor of a singing voice who *begins* by learning songs, to his material limitation if not more probably to his ultimate vocal disaster.

So with the person who is taught 'elocution' before his voice has been trained. He is a mere parrot. He is beginning at the wrong end, and will remain at the wrong end. He is adjured to 'speak up'—to 'pitch his voice' higher—not to let it drop at the ends of phrases—to take care of the consonants and the vowels will take care of themselves—or *vice versa*—to 'put' an emphasis on this, that or the other word—to take this word up, and the other word down—to

speak from his chest, in his head, in his nose—to give it 'more punch'. He is told to speak fast and yet faster, regardless of the fact that you must walk before you can run, and that speed worked for prematurely will be got at the cost not only of distinctness but of intelligibility. And if the pupil's voice does not seem 'loud' enough the teacher frequently goes into another room and makes him *shout* till he can be heard. And so on, *ad infinitum*, till the unfortunate student is a thing of shreds and patches, destitute of spontaneity or sincerity, artificial, and miserably, wretchedly, self-conscious.

This description of 'elocution' is not exaggerated. Such methods are still employed, as was testified to by Komisarjevsky as recently as 1929 when he said in his *Myself and the Theatre*:

'The mimicking of the producer's inflections, so usual on the English stage, merely makes the actor's speech hard and feelingless, and the study of "elocution" or "declamation" leads to artificiality and mannerisms in acting. As the student of "deportment" becomes conscious of his or her movements, so the student of "elocution" becomes conscious of his voice, intonations, and inflections, and that's the end of him as an actor. *An actor should work at his voice and speech by studying voice-production and diction, not by "elocuting".*' (The italics are mine.)

So I am not, as many might suppose, 'flogging a dead donkey'. If the true meaning of the word 'elocution' be understood it will be seen that I do not overstate matters when I say that the interchangeable way in which the terms 'voice-production' and 'elocution' have been—and still are—used is nothing short of tragic.

When the science of voice-production was first expounded by my father it was hastily assumed by those who did not trouble to make themselves acquainted with it that it was just a new term for elocution with a little 'hocus-pocus' added. The two camps were so sharply divided, and the older party so determined in its opposition to a thing it knew nothing about, that the barriers were for a time insurmountable.

One leading playwright, a contemporary of my father's, was so prejudiced against voice-production for the actor—having confused it with the type of 'elocution' that I have described—that he declined to allow any one to appear in his plays who was an exponent of it. On a memorable occasion when with one exception not a single member of the cast was able to respond to his wishes at rehearsal he held up to the rest of the company the only actor who was able to reproduce his tone and inflections without becoming artificial, as proof that his demands could be complied with: and the said actor was the only one who had studied this newfangled method of 'voice-production'! Had this been known in the first place he would certainly not have been engaged.

This, of course, is ancient history. I do not suggest that such a thing could happen now; but we have still far to go in the training of the voice and body of the actor before we can reproduce the equivalent of the methods that gave us the great ones of the past.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF PRESENT-DAY SPEECH

SERIOUS deterioration in our speech has taken place in the last few years, and we shall find it has the same bearing upon the actor's diction as have the prevailing bad habits of physical carriage upon his movements.

Protest appears in the press from time to time against the clipped, mutilated, smudgy, indistinct, frequently nasal speaking that is heard everywhere. A correspondence ensues, showing a unanimity of condemnation which is remarkable. Then the matter drops.

Judges are reported as saying that they are incessantly obliged to ask witnesses to 'speak up'.

Dr. A. C. Seward, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, in his presidential address at the Conference of Educational Associations in 1926, urged the desirability of maintaining a greater uniformity in the pronunciation of English in all grades of schools. He pleaded for a standard of spoken English that might fairly be expected from educated persons, and stated that it was a serious handicap to University students if, in spite of success in examinations, they had not acquired the habit of speaking correctly.

Professors, on the one hand, complain that the speech of students is incorrect, that it is ungrammatical and badly expressed, that vowels are impure, consonants slurred and omitted, and phrases jerky and monosyllabic. Students, on the other hand, say that unless they get to lectures early

enough to secure seats near the front they cannot hear what lecturers say.

In churches, in Parliament, the Law Courts, lecture rooms, schools, theatres, not merely is it rare to hear good speaking from the oratorical point of view but it is increasingly rare to hear *accurate* speech, by which I mean pure vowels and properly enunciated consonants.

If we do not hear it from the mouths of public speakers—notably from the clergy and from actors—is it likely that we shall find it in private life?

Listen to young people when they are talking amongst themselves. Their speech consists mainly of disconnected remarks, which are either mumbled, or 'barked' so explosively as to be quite incomprehensible. Even facial expression gives no clue to their subject-matter. It is as blank and inexpressive as the Red Indian's. Attempts on the part of elders to get a sentence repeated with its full complement of vowels, consonants, prepositions, and pronouns, are usually met with self-consciousness and resentment, if not with derision. It is obvious that they feel it to be 'affected' to speak correctly, with pure vowels, clearly enunciated consonants, and pleasant tone. This attitude constitutes one of the chief stumbling-blocks in the endeavour to raise the standard of speech.

I might remark in passing that it is also a source of great difficulty in the treatment of stammering. I constantly find that the stammerer is handicapped by the feeling that he will be conspicuous if he respond to directions to 'speak up', to make his vowels full and sonorous, and to speak with rhythm and continuity.

It is strange that with our heritage of noble verse and fine,

nervous, rhythmic prose we should be so shy of good speech, not only in everyday talk but in public. Rhythm and continuity are fast disappearing, with the result that good delivery of verse is becoming more and more rare, and Shakespeare is either spoken exaggeratedly, in the endeavour to get the 'beat', or colloquially in the endeavour to speak the lines naturally.

So fixed have these habits of slovenly speech become, and so difficult do teachers and producers find it to get pure tone and clear enunciation, that the suggestion has actually been advanced that in the course of time physiological changes must have taken place in the mouth which make good speech impossible! This is certainly not the case. In the course of centuries no change in the structure of the mouth has taken place that would account for slovenly diction, and it would be a pity that such a theory should be accepted, for then, indeed, all hope of betterment would have to be abandoned. Lazy speakers would argue that it would be useless to rouse themselves to any attempt at improvement if physiological changes had taken place that made it impossible or difficult.

An interesting and more plausible hypothesis was advanced by D. H. Lawrence, in *The Boy in the Bush*. He suggested that there may be a psychological factor at the root of careless speech, as found in Australia, in resentment of discipline. Speaking of one of his characters he said:

'He listened to the Australian voices and the Australian accent around him—the careless, slovenly speech in the uncontrolled slack, caressive voices. . . . There was an abandon in it all—an abandon of restrictions and confining control. Why have control? Why have authority? Why not let everybody do as they liked? Why not?'

Can some such feeling be at the back of speech deterioration in England?

It may be so, or at any rate it may be one of the factors. There has been a great reaction of late years against the disciplinary measures formerly employed in dealing with children and young people. Youth emerged into a position of authority in the War that was, in comparison with all previous standards, unheard of and quite abnormal. The atmosphere of tension that prevailed then produced clipped, choked, abrupt speech. Gallant boys and girls, mere children, facing a world of incredible monstrosity, sheltered themselves behind a protective, defensive curtness of speech, and a blank, mask-like set of countenance. Nothing is so infectious and so quickly established as tricks of speech and facial expression. The small brothers and sisters quickly imitated and acquired the tone and diction of those heroic youthful elders, and in a short time the thing was established.

But a factor of equal potency in the prevailing carelessness of speech is, undoubtedly, a species of shyness, the feeling to which I have already referred, that it is not 'good form' to speak well. If only we could bring about the contrary feeling—that it is the worst possible form to speak our noble language badly! Surely we ought to be able to rouse a sense of *noblesse oblige* in the matter, a feeling of patriotism towards one's language?

There is less excuse for a duke to speak badly than a coal-heaver, and the former by setting a bad example encourages speech deterioration.

I heard an extraordinary illustration of this recently in a West End theatre. The hostess of a party seated in front of

me, in the fifth row of the stalls—whence every word spoken on the stage should have been heard easily—begged one of her guests to take the place nearest the centre, saying:

'Mr. A' (the leading actor) 'is difficult to hear. I think it is because he tries to speak like a gentleman!'

The remark was made in all sincerity. It was not intended as a joke. Nor could it be explained by the person to whom it was made being deaf. I satisfied myself as to this by observation.

What an indictment of present-day speech!

It is as well, however, to realize that our national habits of speech have never been above reproach, a fact which naturally contributes to deterioration. As far back as three hundred years ago there is evidence that we compared unfavourably with other nations in our manner of speaking, for Milton, in a pamphlet on education, wrote:

'We English, being far northerly, do not open our mouths wide enough to grace a southern tongue, but are observed of all other nations to speak exceeding close and inward.'

This criticism might have been made to-day, though the suggestion that the failure to open our mouths is due to climatic influence will hardly be endorsed by philologists. It may more correctly be ascribed to a mixture of shyness and indifference. Whatever the cause, it is very certain not only that with the passage of time we have not overcome the faults noted by Milton but that a marked increase in deterioration has taken place of late.

If any one doubt this let them consult one of the latest books on Phonetics and he will find sad evidence of it.

We have it also on no less an authority than that of the late Poet Laureate, Dr. Robert Bridges, who said in his

book, *English Pronunciation*: 'That the present state of English pronunciation is critical; and that the conversational speech of Southern England is fixing a degraded form.'

Those who have been labouring for years in the cause of pure speech, and who have perhaps become disheartened not only by the lack of support and co-operation in quarters where it should have been forthcoming without stint, but by the apathy and indifference with which attempts to rouse interest and a sense of responsibility have been received, will perhaps be animated by fresh courage on learning that a Society has been formed for the cultivation of Pure English, whose objects are *linguistic*, not *literary*. Those who have the matter of the preservation of our language at heart should join the Society, for only by co-operation will anything be accomplished.

Dr. Bridges, writing in *The Society's Work*, reminded us that we are the inheritors of what many claim to be the finest living literature in the world, and warned us that

'the history of languages shows that there is danger lest our speech should grow out of touch with that literature, and, losing, as it were, its capital, and living from hand to mouth, fall from its nobility and gradually dissociate itself from apparent continuity with its great legacy, so that to an average Briton our Elizabethan literature would come to be as much an obsolete language as Middle English is to us now, or as Homer or Aeschylus to a modern Greek.'

The significance of these facts to the actor will be apparent. Unless he undertake regular, systematic work for the education of his ear, and for the training of the muscles of respiration, voice, and articulation, *he will not be able* to utter any-

thing but the smudgy, inaccurate sounds that pass current as English, and he will consequently be limited to the light, ephemeral pieces of the moment.

I believe it is only in England that the actor does not go through rigorous training to enable him to surmount the limitations and inaccuracies of everyday speech before he is allowed to appear in public. In France, though the standard of speech is much higher than ours and the 'man in the street' speaks with crisp, clear consonants and pure vowels, a lengthy, comprehensive speech-training is given to all who are going on the stage. The man who pronounces the letter 'r' in his throat must learn to trill it on the tip of his tongue, which is only accomplished by long and patient muscle drill. Sarah Bernhardt relates that she had to work hard to acquire it.

Thorough training is also carried out in Germany, where the ugliness of ordinary speech habits would not be tolerated on the stage, and where also the gutteral 'r' has to be overcome.

George Henry Lewes commented on the speech-training of German actors as far back as 1875.

He said:

'The actors are thoroughly *trained*: they know the principles of their art—a very different thing from knowing "the business". They pay laudable attention to one supremely important point recklessly disregarded on our stage, namely, elocution. They know how to *speak*—both verse and prose; to speak without mouthing, yet with effective cadence; speech elevated above the tone of conversation without being stilted. How many actors are there on our stage who have learned this?

'How many are there who, with an art which is not ap-

parent except to the very critical ear, can manage the cadences and emphases of prose, so as to be at once perfectly easy, natural, yet incisive and effective? The foreigner, whose ear has been somewhat lacerated by the dreadful intonation of common German speech, is surprised to find how rich and pleasant the language is when spoken on the stage; the truth being that the actors have learned to speak, and are not permitted to call themselves actors at a Hof Theater until they have conquered those slovenly and discordant intonations which distort the speech of vulgar men.'

He goes on to express his amazement, after being tortured by the hideous speech of the people of the town where he was staying, at hearing real beauty of tone on the stage.

It is of considerable interest to compare this appreciation of the diction of German actors by one of our greatest English critics, whose book on acting is a classic that should be on the bookshelf of every actor, with German criticism of the fine company of English actors who appeared with Forbes-Robertson in Germany in 1898.

The critics of Berlin in writing of the performance of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* were unanimous in remarking on the immobility of the actors, on their lack of facial expression, and on the inaudibility of most of the company. The first act, which is played almost entirely by men, was likened by one critic to 'an assembly of Red Indians sitting round a camp fire'. This criticism was the more striking as they were warm in their praise of the Shakespearian performances, in their appreciation of the finish which distinguished them, and of the value of the great tradition the English actors brought with them. Nevertheless, their speech was adversely commented on even in the Shakespeare; indeed, a leading

critic said that the voice of one of the actors was like 'pebbles rattling over a corrugated iron roof'.

Now let us see in what way our national habits of speech are unfavourable to the actor, and what special stumbling-block is created by the deterioration that has been so marked of late.

What, exactly, is taking place?

All unaccented vowels tend to be reduced to the same indeterminate sound.

According to Professor Daniel Jones, Lecturer on Phonetics at University College:

'To'	is pronounced	'ter'
'From'	,,	'frerm'
'That'	,,	'thert'
'Of'	,,	'erv'
'The'	,,	'ther'
'Are'	,,	'er'
'For'	,,	'fer'
'Suggest'	,,	'sergest'
'Produce'	,,	'prerduce'
'Suppose'	,,	'serpose' and so on.

In my opinion this is not a very successful attempt at spelling this type of mispronunciation. It would be more accurate to say that the unaccented vowel is *omitted*, rather than that the vowel 'e' is substituted and the letter 'r' inserted. What really happens is as follows:

'To be or not to be' becomes
'T' be or not t' be'.

'From year to year' becomes
'Fr'm yer t' yer'.

'The seven ages of man' becomes
'Th' sev'n ages 'v man'.

'I discovered that it was of no importance' becomes
' 'd'scovered th't 'tw's 'v no 'mportance.'

'The utterance of the general statement' becomes
'Th' utt'r'nce 'v th' gen'r'l statem'nt.

Where two vowels occur in succession one of them is more often than not omitted, a fault so heinous as to be positively common in effect. Thus:

'Valuable' becomes 'valuble'
'Usually' „ 'usu'lly'
'Ideal' „ 'ideel'
'Real' „ 'reel'

'Towel' is rhymed with 'fowl'
and 'Juliet', nine times out of ten, says:
'Come, file!' instead of 'Come, phial!'

A particularly ugly mispronunciation that is spreading everywhere is the conversion of the short 'a' into 'e'.

Listen to the way the cab tout says:
'Cab or carriage'. He pronounces it,
'Keb aw kerridge'.

Most persons of education would repudiate such a pronunciation, and would deny—probably with considerable indignation—that they were capable of such a thing. It is difficult to make them believe that instead of saying:

'I went to my Bank in the Strand', they say
'I went t' my Benk 'n th' Strend'.

Nevertheless, so it too often is pronounced—even by B.B.C. Announcers.

This fault is the result of lazy mouth work, and as for the

most part people cannot hear themselves they are unaware that they have acquired it.

A few years ago it would have been impossible to find any one of education who pronounced 'i', 'ow', 'ō' or 'ā' impurely. Now, a horrible cockney mutilation of these sounds has spread upwards, invading all classes, and we constantly hear 'mah-ee' for 'my', or, what is almost more offensive, a mincing, flat sound such as 'quate' for 'quite'; and 'nai-oo' for 'now', often—to make matters worse—with a strongly nasal quality.

The 'o' as in 'no' has degenerated in a particularly objectionable way. This is a 'modified' vowel, and the modification, being a subtle one, is difficult to define, and is therefore especially liable to mispronunciation. Correctly spoken, it is a blend of 'o' as in 'or' with 'oo' as in 'pool'. In order to pronounce it accurately the teeth must be liberally opened, the upper lip raised and the corners of the lips adjusted forwards, for the commencement of the sound, and as the teeth close at the end of the sound the lips must be pushed rapidly forward as in whistling. The result will be a resonant, correct 'ō'.

The modern mouth is too lazy and stiff to be capable of executing these movements. The sound is usually initiated with closed, or practically closed, teeth, and flaccid lips, with corners drawn back, resulting in 'ur-oo'. Place your mouth like this and you will produce the prevalent mispronunciation of 'ō'.

The treatment of 'ā' as in 'day' is equally bad. In the uneducated mouth it becomes literally 'dy', 'pale' becomes 'pile', and so on.

This vitiated pronunciation of 'i', 'ow', 'ō', and 'ā' had its origin in London, but is spreading to other parts, especially

southwards, with startling rapidity. In many places remote from London one might imagine oneself in a slum, listening to typical cockney.

I do not suggest that educated persons say 'mike' for 'make', but I do say that even they are frequently by no means entirely above reproach, and that these sounds are acquiring a definite impurity. Even when this is not the case there is such a growing tendency to 'clip', and emasculate them, as to go far to justify the statement that English is an unmusical language; for such treatment makes virile, pure, resonant tone impossible. Purely and correctly spoken this reproach cannot be made.

To the scamped vowels I have already instanced may be added the omission of 'i' in such words as 'family', which is pronounced 'fam'ly', or its conversion into 'u'; 'charity' being pronounced 'charuty'; the omission of 'er' in words such as 'govern', 'tavern', which become 'gov'n', 'tav'n'; and of 'ar' in 'particularly' which is clipped into 'p'ticul'ly'.

To pronounce 'short' vowels such as these accurately and with good tone, especially in rapid speaking, a high degree of mobility of the jaw, tongue, and facial muscles, is required. This is seldom found nowadays unless definite training has been sought.

The extent to which we guess what is being said from the context is only realized when we recall the difficulty that we experience in understanding a name or word that we do not know; indeed, it is frequently necessary to ask that it shall be spelt.

Take the name 'Powell' for instance. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred it sounds like 'Purl'.

As for words such as 'tower', 'fire', 'sore', they are pro-

nounced more often than not 'tar', 'far', 'saw': to the perplexity of foreigners and frequently also of ourselves, when the word intended is not easily guessed from the context.

I once took part in a dinner-table discussion of a play then before the public, and was puzzled by one of the guests remarking on the excellent performances of the actors who appeared as 'the gods'. I racked my brains in vain in the endeavour to remember any 'gods' in the play. I could not recall them at all, and began to think I must have slept through their appearance, when enlightenment came in the course of further conversation. What the speaker intended to say was, 'the guards'!

When we consider the large number of words in the English language which are spelt differently and pronounced alike it will be realized how immensely more difficult it becomes to follow the spoken word when these are added to unnecessarily by slovenly articulation. It constitutes a strain on the attention which is actually fatiguing, and it is distressing to reflect on the difficulties thus created for the deaf, who are dependent upon lip-reading for intercourse with their fellow men. We hear a great deal about the wonderful training that is given them nowadays in lip-reading, but it is not realized—as it ought to be—that those who have any association with them are in almost equal need of training themselves, so that they may speak with the clearness and accuracy which will enable them to be understood.

Consonants are treated every whit as badly as the vowels —blurred, mispronounced, omitted, and gross substitutions, one for another, made. And here is a curious point. Whereas vowels tend to be clipped and shortened, consonants, which should for the most part be crisp and short, are dragged and

unduly prolonged, a fault which reacts unfavourably upon the vowels. Consonants are, with a few exceptions, checks or stops to tone; therefore when they are prolonged the balance of things is apt to be maintained by *shortening* the vowels. The result is a vicious circle. If vowels are shortened the carrying-power of the voice is affected, and if consonants are dragged, clearness of diction suffers.

It is useless to say 'take care of the consonants and the vowels will take care of themselves', or 'take care of the vowels and the consonants will take care of themselves', for they are totally opposite in character and formation. Where diction is faulty it is usually necessary to work at consonants and vowels *separately* before they can be correctly combined in words.

The prevailing faults in the utterance of consonants are:

(1) 'dragging' or 'slurring' them;

(2) omission of one when two or more occur in succession;

(3) dropping the final consonant of a word; and,

(4) the substitution of one consonant for another.

It would be wearisome if I dealt fully with consonants. I will content myself with instancing a few of the most generally misused ones, and in particular such as tend, when omitted or indistinctly pronounced, to be the worst stumbling-blocks to the apprehending of the sense.

Amongst the first class—the fault of 'dragging' or 'slurring' consonants—is the prolongation of the sibilant, 's'. This is excessively ugly, particularly when several occur in close succession in a phrase. Get someone to say, for example:

'S-ee the s-pray s-triking s-ands-tone cliffs-s'

and you cannot fail to be struck with the extremely bad effect.

Another fault to be deprecated in connexion with the 's'

is the frequent conversion of the soft 's' into a hard one, in such a word as 'because'.

A similar type of mistake is made in 'th', the soft 'th' in 'with' constantly being converted into a hard one. Both are incorrect; the hiss of the breath is ugly and should be avoided.

Other letters that are often 'dragged' or 'slurred' are 't' and 'p'. Listen to the effect of:

'T-ake T-ina out—t—o t—ea.'

'P-ay P-eter's p—ocket money in p—ence.'

Almost every consonant can be 'dragged' and unduly prolonged in this manner, a habit which is not only very ugly but contributes largely to indistinctness.

Examples of the second class of fault, omission of a consonant when two or more occur in succession, are:

Mis's, for mists.

Fif's, for fifths.

Fac's, for facts.

Gove'ment, for Government.

Examples of the third class, dropping the final consonant, are:

He an' I, for he and I.

Huntin', for hunting.

Jus' like, for just like.

Subjec', for subject.

Examples of the fourth class, substitution of one consonant for another, are:

Breaze, for breathes.

Wiv, for with.

Nacher, for nature.

Ejucate, for educate.

Queshtion, for question.

People are often deterred from the attempt to correct these faults—particularly the endeavour to avoid converting the 't' in such words as nature into 'ch'—by its sounding laboured and exaggerated. This would not be the case if the muscles of articulation were first drilled and rendered flexible.

Another fault, which makes a very slovenly effect, is that of commencing the next word with the consonant that should have ended the previous word, thus:

Thi -sevening.

Fo -rinstance.

I have already alluded in passing to the conversion of 'fire' into 'fah', 'sore' into 'saw', 'tower' into 'tah', but I propose now to deal more fully with this hideous mispronunciation, which is becoming more and more general.

In many instances a twofold error is perpetrated; the vowel is changed and the 'r' omitted, as, for example, when fire is pronounced 'fah', and by its omission the language is deprived of a sound of great richness and sonority.

The bareness, flatness, and 'emptiness' of such a word as 'roar' when pronounced 'raw' as it now is by the majority is most striking when heard after the correct pronunciation, which is rich, full, and resonant.

The loss of this sound is really so serious, and so little realized, that it is necessary to analyse it more closely than some of the other faults I have enumerated. Most of the latter will be obvious the moment attention is drawn to them, but so much misapprehension exists as to the proper pronunciation of the non-trilled 'r' that it is desirable to try and clear our ideas on the subject.

At the root of the confusion is a fundamental miscon-

ception as to the nature of this sound. The letter 'r' when occurring at the end of a phrase, or when followed by a consonant, should really be classed as a *vowel* sound rather than as a consonant. When it is followed by a vowel it is a bona fide consonant and should be trilled lightly, by the tip of the tongue beating very rapidly on the hard palate just behind the upper front teeth, as in 'very', 'serious', 'merry'. It should also be trilled when a word ending with 'r' is followed by one which commences with a vowel, such as 'for instance', 'far in advance'.

I have already pointed out that it must not be said in such a way that it is made to commence the second word, thus: 'fo' rinstance'. I think the desire to avoid this fault is often the cause of the omission of the letter; which is of course merely an evasion of the difficulty.

Oddly enough, many persons who say they cannot trill the 'r' will *insert* one where none exists, and they will say, 'the law'r of England', 'the idea'r of it'. This is a really dreadful fault.

As a rule when a speaker is told that he is not sounding his 'r' he jumps to the conclusion that he is being asked to trill it everywhere, and he tries to say 'for'r'r me'—'a sor-r-r-r-e point' and so on. This may be good Scottish, but it is bad English. South of the Tweed it is incorrect to trill the 'r' before a consonant, or at the end of the last word of a phrase, and those who endeavour to do so feel it to be so unnatural that they usually, in the absence of a demonstration of the right way to say it, give up the attempt and omit it altogether. Of the two evils this is perhaps the lesser one.

The non-trilled 'r' is a subtle sound, and there are factors

operating against its use which are for the most part not understood. Let us try to find out what these are.

When we analyse consonants and vowels from the speech point of view, we shall find that consonants—with the single exception of 'h', which is an emission of air through the open mouth—are formed by a closure of some part of the cavity of the mouth, and that all but L, M, N, NG, R, are checks and stops to voice; whereas vowels are all formed with the mouth open, by means of readjustments in the shape of the cavity effected by movements of tongue, cheeks, and lips, and are sustained vocal sound.

To which class does the non-trilled 'r' belong? Undoubtedly to the latter, for it is formed with open mouth, and the sound is vocalized.

Why is this not generally recognized?

Because its sound in relation to the vowel that precedes it is dipthongal; and it is formed so lightly and rapidly that the average ear does not detect it.

If it is assumed to be a consonant something short and unvocal will be expected, and in such a word as 'roar' the sound will consequently be cut off quickly, converting it into 'raw'.

Let us turn for a moment to a consideration of what takes place when two vowels occur in succession in a word. Take a hand mirror and watch what happens in saying the words 'theory' and 'reality'. The teeth should be well opened in the 'e' and care should be taken that the tip of the tongue after forming the 'th' in 'theory' and the 'r' in 'reality' comes into contact with the bottom of the lower front teeth. Keep it there; *do not allow the mouth to close in passing from one vowel to the other, nor the sound to cease*, and it will be seen

that the tongue flattens slightly. Precisely so is the process in forming the 'r' that is not trilled.

Let me add, however, that if the tongue be stiff and has become stereotyped in wrong movement, this will probably not occur. Again and again have I found that people cannot at first hear the difference between 'saw' and 'sore', 'farther' and 'father', *but they can see it.* They can *see* the undulating movement in my tongue when I demonstrate it to them, and then on looking at their own mouths in a mirror they find that nothing of the kind takes place. Very rarely can it be reproduced *till exercises have been practised* and the tongue rendered flexible and obedient. The *eye* must *first* be appealed to; then, as mobility of muscles is achieved, *ear* develops and perception of the sound comes. No voluntary effort should be made to bring about the movement of the tongue. When flexibility of tongue and perception of the tonal result of its movement in another person have developed, the movement will take place automatically in response to the desire to reproduce the sound patterned by the teacher.

The acquirement of the non-trilled 'r' results in a striking gain in sonority and richness of tone, and nowhere is the benefit so marked as in the delivery of Shakespeare; or indeed in verse of any kind. I grant that if an actor is portraying a typical character in a light comedy of the moment he may, and perhaps *should*, omit the 'r' and possibly also the 'h' in words commencing 'wh', converting 'which' into 'witch', 'whine' into 'wine' and so on; but faults such as these are not permissible in Shakespeare or in any play in which correct, good English is required.

Another factor not usually recognized as a stumbling-

block to good diction is that of syllabic division. If we consult any dictionary prior to the new Oxford Dictionary we shall find that words such as 'welcome', 'captain', 'summer', 'pitiful' were divided thus: 'wel'come', 'cap'-tain', 'sum'mer', 'pit'i'ful'.

The result upon the spoken word was very bad. It led to unduly short vowels and to undue prolongation of consonants, faults which are prejudicial both to carrying-power and clearness of enunciation. To no public speaker are they so detrimental as to the actor.

The realization of this in my early teaching days led me to evolve a method of formulating for speakers a representation of the relative proportions of vowels and consonants from the speech aspect. Instead of

'Wel'come, black' north eas'ter', I set it forth thus:

'We–lco-me, bla–ck no-rth ea–ste-r', employing a line for the vowel in the accented syllable double the length of the one in the unaccented syllable.

I have always shown those studying with me that it is impossible to allocate the length to vowels and the crispness to consonants which are essential for carrying-power and clear enunciation if we attempt to speak in accordance with the arbitrary syllabic division most adults of the present time learnt in childhood.

It was, therefore, with great satisfaction that I found that this reform, which I had advocated for years, has in the new Oxford Dictionary received official sanction.

The division is there shown thus:

'We·lcome', 'su·mmer'.

For the spoken word I prefer the method I have evolved, i.e. 'we–lco-me', 'su–mme-r', because it clearly means that

the vowel sound is to be *extended* or *maintained*. The tendency, already only too great in English speakers, to clip vowels may be confirmed and encouraged by the sign of the 'stop' used by the Oxford Dictionary. We have from earliest childhood associated with a dot the instruction to *stop*, and therefore in my opinion its employment to indicate syllabic division is not as graphic as the line I employ, which conveys unmistakably, 'carry on the tone'.

Another fault of comparatively recent growth that has a prejudicial effect upon audibility, clearness of diction, and quality of tone, is nasal insufficiency.

Clear speech and carrying-power are absolutely impossible without nasal resonance—which must of course not be confounded with nasal *tone*.

Nasal *resonance* is a reinforcement of the voice by means of co-vibrations in the nasal passages. Its effect is really magical. By its acquirement a voice that is poor, thin, lifeless, and wellnigh inaudible, may be converted into a really charming organ, of more value than many a 'big' voice, the possession of which is by no means an unmixed blessing on the stage, unless modulated and used with skill and delicacy.

Occasionally nasal resonance is found in an untrained person, who is consequently said to have 'a naturally fine voice', a voice conspicuous for its ring, ease, and carrying-power. As a rule, however, it must be cultivated.

The simplest way to bring about realization of what nasal resonance means in a voice-user's equipment is to recall what a speaker sounds like who has a cold in the head. Not merely is the tone dull and muffled, having neither 'ring', brilliance, nor carrying-power, but distinct articulation is

impossible. Every letter, except those which depend solely on an emission of air for their formation, is adversely affected, whilst three, 'm', 'n', and 'ng', cannot be uttered at all. 'M' and 'n' become 'b' and 'd' respectively, and 'ng' sounds something like 'g-g-d'. It is frequently said that a person in this condition is speaking through his nose, but a moment's reflection will show that if breathing through the nose is either impeded or impossible, *speaking* through the nose must be equally so.

On no account, however, must it be imagined that it therefore follows that in normal, good speech, voice passes *through the nose. If it did the tone would be nasal.*

Why, then, is speech as adversely affected by a cold in the head if only the letters 'm', 'n', and 'ng' pass through the nose?

Because, for the production of resonant tone, the air in the nasal passages should be thrown into co-vibrations with the vocalized stream of breath as it passes out of the mouth.

The effect of nasal resonance upon the carrying-power of the voice is remarkable, and the most surprising thing to those who are unaware of its potentialities is that the lightest tones, spoken in what seems to the listener the effortless, easy, ordinary tone of social intercourse, carries to the farthest corners of the auditorium.

The advantage to the actor of a carrying-power such as this is obvious. Given anything like a good voice and clear diction it is comparatively easy to speak so as to be heard in Shakespeare or 'heroic' drama; but in modern, light plays, actors are either too loud, or, when told to speak more quietly, they are inaudible beyond the first few rows of the stalls.

Stanislavsky, in *My Life in Art*, alluding to this difficulty, says:

'The hardest thing on the stage is to speak neither louder nor softer than is necessary, and at the same time to be simple and natural. But to speak softly means to wipe out the entire rôle, and so we were forced to speak louder than was necessary. Loudness for the sake of loudness is not a creative goal.'

Speaking of his own difficulties he says:

'Those places which demanded only simple saying were "crumpled" by me, *due to my imperfect speech.*' (The italics are mine.) 'Some words fell out of the text; others did not reach the public because I spoke too quietly; still others were "crumpled" and the philosophic thought itself became incomprehensible. It could not be made one's own.'

I have no hesitation in saying that the 'imperfect speech' of to-day 'crumples'—to use Stanislavsky's graphic expression—the actor's chief medium of expression, limiting his range of interpretation and rendering him to a large extent inaudible; and the most serious aspect of the matter is that it is not realized. If it were, it could undoubtedly be rectified by the right kind of training.

People cannot hear themselves; and we might well say: 'O wad some power the giftie gie us to *hear* oursels as ithers hear us.'

I once heard an entertainer give an imitation of the tonal characteristics and diction of Germans, French, and English. The words employed in his English imitation were practically incomprehensible. The typical faults in diction such as 'fah' for 'fire', 'nah-oo' for 'now', and so on, and the throaty, unresonant tone, were inimitably rendered.

At the conclusion of the sketch two young Englishmen sitting in front of me stood up, turned round to look at the audience, thus facing me, and discussed the imitations.

'The German and French were excellent,' said they, 'but the English was like nothing on earth. Perfectly idiotic! No one ever spoke like that': *and every word they uttered was an exact reproduction of the entertainer's imitation*!

So it is necessary in training those who are going on the stage to rouse in them a perception of the slipshod speech that prevails, and to make them realize that it is nothing short of stultifying to the actor. The muscles of breathing, voice, and articulation must be trained—probably re-educated—till they are his obedient servants instead of, for the most part, his masters.

An actor must be in complete control of his medium, of which surely speech is the greatest thing. If he employ a pronunciation intentionally, because it is indicative of the character and times he is portraying, well and good; but if he employ the same tone and diction indiscriminately, in short, *if he can employ no other*, he is lacking in one of the most important—if not the *most* important—portions of the actor's equipment.

An actor in his time plays, or should play, many parts; if he can only speak the speech—the debased speech—of the moment, he can only play one part—himself.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ART OF SPEAKING VERSE

THE question whether a study of the art of speaking verse should be included in the curriculum of the student of dramatic art is a vexed one.

It will of course be considered necessary for those who wish to become Shakespearian actors; though the variety of methods that we find in the finished product suggest either a far from uniform standard of technique or a very inadequate time devoted to it.

Moreover, the confining of the study of verse to those who are training specifically for Shakespeare, besides the loss of a potent educative factor, is another instance of the tendency to place those who wish to play Shakespeare in a category apart.

Even when instruction in the speaking of verse is included in the curriculum of those who are studying solely for modern work, it is seldom treated as an integral part of their training. A certain amount of Shakespeare may be included, but the study of it will probably be perfunctory because of the assumption that it unfits the actor for modern work.

As for a systematic study of the speaking of lyrical verse by the dramatic student, whether he propose to become a Shakespearian or a modern actor, it is practically non-existent. Many, indeed, hold that it is detrimental. This is a grave error. The omission of definite instruction in the art of speaking verse, both dramatic and lyric, makes training poorer by the loss of an invaluable means of acquiring a high degree of excellence in the technique of speech; to the

detriment of beauty and continuity of tone, management of breath, and development of a sense of rhythm. On the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional side the loss is beyond estimate. Its technical value to the actor in the matter of breath-control alone is enormous; in fact, the practice of sonorous passages of verse may in this respect be said to be the equivalent of solfeggi to the singer.

William Archer (who studied with my father and learnt from him of the immense importance of breath-control to the actor) remarked whimsically in reference to the need for good breathing in the speaking of verse:

'It is when the actor is short-winded that the poet appears long-winded.'

The great actor of old was bred and reared on verse, so to say; and though it is true that a large number of the plays performed in his time were written in verse, which therefore necessitated a study of it, this does not affect the fact of its supreme technical value to speech in general.

Critics in the Elizabethan period were unsparing in their condemnation of any shortcomings in this direction. Colley Cibber, for instance, in a comparison of the respective merits of Betterton, Booth, and Wilks, said:

'Wilks had spirit, but gave too loose a rein to it, and it was seldom he could speak a grave and weighty verse harmoniously; his accents were frequently too sharp and violent, which some time occasion'd his eagerly cutting off half the sound of syllables that ought to have been gently melted into the melody of metre.'

So, even in the period that was pre-eminent for the speaking of verse, actors were criticized for 'clipping' their vowels!

Undoubtedly the effect of the acting when the medium employed is verse is intensified immeasurably upon the imagination and capacity for feeling of the audience by reason of the rhythm and melody. All the more reason, therefore, to lead the actor by a study of verse to apprehend and express the rhythm and beauty of tone inherent in all good prose.

The massacre of rhythm in modern speech is tragic, and more than probably affects the fate of plays. Audiences may not realize that their ears are battered upon by a series of disorderly explosions of sound; but it is so, and one of the fundamental cravings, that for the swing and lilt of rhythm, is thereby frustrated.

Perhaps this is in part the explanation of the success of light musical pieces. The music may not be of a high order, the 'book' may be beneath contempt, the ideas may be as old as the hills, but there will certainly be lilt, a swing—in a word, rhythm.

We all know how the swing of rhythm can carry weary feet and bodies along and give fresh gaiety and courage to the depressed. There is good reason for its use for soldiers.

Here is an interesting passage from *The Old Vic* which testifies to this innate, universal craving for rhythm, and condemns methods which have tended to suppress it:

'There is nothing highbrow about the pleasure in rhythm; it is a mistake to think of it as a pleasure confined to the cultured. On the contrary, rhythm is one of our earliest needs; the swing of verse will catch a child's attention and hold it long before it listens with interest to words that do not echo and balance. The state of mind and ear that finds rhythmic language stilted and boring is not natural either to

the child without learning or to the man who has learned aright; there must be something wrong, badly wrong, with a system which has trained so many of us out of a natural instinct and bereft us of an easy means of joy. The 19th century . . . accustomed its children to a daily ugliness, in speech and surroundings, which they took for granted and ceased to consider a hardship.'

All authorities are agreed not only as to the absence of rhythm from our ordinary speech and the delivery of prose, but as to the eclipse that has taken place in the speaking of verse, both dramatic and lyrical.

'How many actors are there', asked G. H. Lewes, 'who suspect the mysterious charm which lies in rhythm, and have mastered its music?'

Bernard Shaw says in the course of a criticism of present-day speaking of verse: '. . . the elocutionist, because he is a born fool, in which capacity observing with pain that poets have a weakness for imparting to their dramatic dialogue a quality which he (the elocutionist) describes and deplores as "singsong" devotes his life to the art of *breaking up verse* [the italics are mine] in such a way as to make it sound like insanely pompous prose.'

Even after allowing for the exaggeration of the reformer, there is no denying the essential truth of this statement.

But a change seems to be at hand.

If we look round we shall see unmistakable evidence of a renascence of the art of speaking verse; and of its being spoken for its own sake, not from the terrible Victorian point of view of 'effectiveness' for reciting.

The Verse-Speaking Contests which are taking place all over the kingdom prove this beyond shadow of doubt, and

it is of interest to note that the revival is non-professional. Reform comes almost invariably from outside a profession.

The Poet Laureate, Mr. John Masefield, to whom we owe so much in this matter, speaking at the fourth Verse-Speaking Contest at Oxford, said that the contests had been set on foot because it was felt to be time for poets and others interested in poetry to create a tradition for the speaking of verse, adding that there is no such tradition in this country. People did not hear, and did not wish to hear, poetry spoken, he said. He stated, moreover, that at the present time it is possible to see a play and never know from start to finish that it is written in verse! Actors should realize that when a play is written in verse they must accept its conditions and speak it as if it were their own mode of expression.

But how rapidly the speaking of verse is improving may be seen from Mr. St. John Ervine's encomiums in the *Observer* after he had adjudicated at some Verse-Speaking Festivals in the north. He spoke warmly of the idea underlying these festivals and contests, and confirmed the fact that their object is to lead people to speak the English language clearly and finely, and not to encourage reciting.

Indeed, it is not unlikely that these Verse-Speaking Contests may contribute materially to a renascence of pure speech. We cannot speak verse without clearness of consonants, and nobility and beauty of vowels. These are impossible of achievement without control of breath and voice, so we must work for mobility and control of our physical medium. Mind and body will thus be stimulated. We cannot work at verse sufficiently to apprehend its meaning and make it clear to our listeners without stimulating imagination and feeling for beauty, so it follows that we shall

recapture the sense of rhythm, that joyous thing the absence of which from our speech is such a loss.

Because we have lost our sense of rhythm and our faculty for speaking verse, and visual appeal on the stage has been developed at the cost of the vocal, it has naturally reacted upon our performance of Shakespeare most adversely of all. The speaking of Shakespeare of late years—with of course certain notable exceptions—has been notoriously bad. Shakespeare's plays depend almost entirely upon the speaking of the verse, and if, as Mr. Masefield asserts, we have lost the art of speaking verse, and have no tradition of the art, then Shakespeare is a dead letter.

This, too, is Mr. Baughan's view. He says:

'I want to *hear* Shakespeare's plays. The actors alone should bring them to life. It is dreadful in the modern theatre to hear Shakespeare's verse declaimed either with frigid elocutionary art, or with a slack want of it. Seldom do we hear the verse spoken as if it meant anything. The tone of the voice is wrong; the emphasis is misplaced; and there is no human feeling in the delivery of the verse.'

Obviously, as Shakespeare chose the medium of verse for his plays, anything which detracts from its importance either by failure to speak it properly, or by the overloading of the producer's effects, must weaken the drama. The custom of speaking his lines as if they were prose, breaking them up, destroying continuity and rhythm, is an outrage. Not only do we seldom get the feeling that we are listening to verse, but the meaning suffers, and it is just 'words, words, words': and I believe the very actors who ignore the verse claim to do so in order to make the meaning clear!

This is really the apotheosis of violation. Did ever a poet

set a word that was of importance in the sense on an unaccented beat?

Was it ever otherwise in Shakespeare but that if we get the beat, the rhythm of his lines, we get his meaning?

And has it never struck those who speak him as prose that as he has in most plays written some passages in prose it follows that *he must have intended his verse to be spoken as such*?

Moreover, there is considerable significance in the fact that the prose passages are chiefly put into the mouths of the commoners and fools, and that verse is chiefly used by Kings and Queens and the Great Ones.

Further, the bearing of an appreciation of rhythm upon the balance of plays that are not written in verse is far from being realized.

Speaking of this, Komisarjevsky says:

'Without an understanding and practice of rhythm an actor cannot feel the text of the playwright, and cannot achieve the necessary symmetry of the emotional movement in his mind with the movement of his speech and his body. Only rhythmical speech and movement is expressive of the creative mind . . . in drama actors have no feeling for the rhythm and the music of speech. . . . The fact that the actors of to-day have very little idea of how to harmonize emotion, voice, movement, and their surroundings, is one of the main reasons why it is so difficult on the modern stage to achieve unity, and an *ensemble*, and to create an "atmosphere" in any production.'

Note, Komisarjevsky refers to *modern* plays. The sooner the idea is dispelled that the speaking of verse has no bearing upon the interpretation of modern drama, or that there is any risk of its importing a stilted delivery into it, the better for dramatic art.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PITCH AND CARRYING-POWER

THERE are few matters so perplexing to the actor as that of pitch, probably because the term is so loosely and contradictorily used. It is frequently not even used consistently in the same sense by the same person, being indiscriminately employed to describe the acoustics of a theatre, the actor's carrying-power, the range of the voice, and even on occasions the quality of tone.

If the axiom 'Define your terms' were observed, a great deal of confusion would be avoided, to say nothing of the fact that the desired effect would in many cases be achieved without effort.

The endeavour to realize directions which are frequently either obscure or contradictory entails endless worry. Moreover, it frequently leads to forcing the voice by reason of the fact that as the actor cannot go to the back of the dress circle or gallery and hear himself he is necessarily dependent upon the endeavour to link cause and effect by means of his own sensations and the criticisms of others.

In addition, he is handicapped by rehearsing under conditions which are so different from those of performance that he cannot even 'try out' his pitch during rehearsals.

I refer of course to the alteration in the acoustic properties of a theatre or hall in accordance with its being empty or no: to say nothing of rehearsals often being held in a room.

With experience speakers usually arrive at being able to gauge this, but many an ineffective early appearance, many a failure—affecting only too probably the success of the

play—is due to difficulties of pitch. Even when the actor is heard on a first night he may—through worry as to whether he is 'getting the pitch' of the theatre, or because in the course of rehearsals he has been unable to respond to criticisms of his tone—start off in a wrong key, from which he cannot extricate himself through the whole performance. The effect of this will be to deprive him of spontaneity and prevent him from imparting life and conviction to the author's words.

Now let us see what is meant by 'pitch' (*a*) of tone, (*b*) of a building, and we will then pass to a consideration of how it should be dealt with by the actor.

(*a*) Pitch of tone depends solely upon the rate of vibration, the greater the rate in a given time the higher being the pitch.

Musical sound or tone is the result of vibrations which occur at regular intervals and with a sufficient rapidity of succession. These vibrations do not give rise to the sensation *sound* unless they throw our hearing apparatus into similar vibrations, and the medium which communicates them to the ear is the 'air-ocean' which surrounds us, through which the vibrating motion travels as waves.

It is important to realize that nothing in the nature of explosive force is needed in order to communicate the vibrations of the sounding body to the air; it is a matter of setting up to-and-fro motions in the air.

If the full implication of the last remark be grasped it will be understood that the 'setting up of to-and-fro motions' requires a quiet, steady 'launching' which has nothing in it of suddenness or violence. It connotes a minimum of active effort.

Let us as concrete illustration of what is implied in this 'setting up of to-and-fro motions' recall and visualize what takes place in setting a swing into motion. If a gentle, steady push be employed the swing moves gently and smoothly forward and falls gently and smoothly back. Let a sudden jerk be employed to start the swing and no rhythmic to-and-fro movement follows. The body of the swing is deflected from the straight, and it moves in a series of jerks and bumps which are ugly to behold and uncomfortable to the person seated in the swing.

Similarly, when the vibrations of sound are initiated and communicated to the air explosively they do not 'travel'; there is a sort of 'bark' which seems to expend itself shatteringly at close range; the tone recoils on itself, boomerang-wise, and *drops*, instead of flowing outwards. This explosive attack of tone is usually on a *high* pitch which is certain to result in a sudden fall to a low pitch.

'Keep it up', then says the producer. 'You are letting it drop. It won't get over the footlights. Keep it up—keep it up.'

And so begins the fatal confusion of pitch and carrying-power which leads to a host of other errors. Nothing is more universally and justly criticized alike by producer and press, and suffered under by audiences, than the 'dropping' of the last word of a phrase or sentence, and unfortunately the terminology employed in criticizing it leads more often than not to the intensifying and perpetuating of the fault. A study of cause and effect will make the reason for this clear.

When a speaker is told that he is dropping his voice, and is adjured to 'keep it up', what does he do? He naturally raises the pitch. This is usually the very reverse of what he

should do. Speakers seldom err on the side of too low a starting-pitch.

The actor who is told that he 'drops his voice' is almost invariably commencing his phrases on too high a note, whence only one tonal progression is possible, and that is a falling one. Consequently when he is told to 'keep it up' the fault as a rule becomes worse and worse, because, lacking explanation of the cause of the fault, he commences his phrases ever higher, and this causes the last word or two of every phrase to drop to such an extent as to be inaudible. It is as inevitable as the swing of the pendulum. If a phrase be begun unduly high it will be finished unduly low, and the pitch will fall below what can be heard.

I remember an amusing and exasperating instance of this. A well-known entertainer was telling a story at a public performance which depended upon the working up of interest and curiosity through a series of statements, the point of which culminated in the last word. What happened was somewhat as follows:

'What is it that we all want? What is it that we dream of and long for, what does the Actor desire, what does the Duke wish for, the Clergyman, the Politician, the Society Woman'—and so on, through a long list, the interest being skilfully worked up, till, when the audience was on tiptoe of expectation, the climax reached them thus:

'What we all want is ——'

And the voice fell so abruptly, and so low that the last word, which contained the whole point of the story, was unheard except by those in the front row or two of the stalls!

This sort of thing is, alas, a familiar experience to all of us.

And is it not exasperating to the last degree to listen to the laughter of the fortunate few who heard the joke? People turn to their neighbours and ask what was said, and while question and answer are being exchanged the next remarks on the stage are lost. Frequently the point of a whole scene is missed, resulting in irritation and boredom on the part of the audience, a condition which is not likely to conduce to the success of the play.

Not only does this fault cause inaudibility, but it also leads to monotony. There must be variety of pitch and tonal progression if monotony is to be avoided, whereas, as I have explained, when phrases are commenced on a high note only one tonal progression can follow, viz. the pitch must fall. Nothing can be more irritatingly monotonous. It causes speech to consist of a series of barked-out exclamations, of which the last word usually fails to reach us. Moreover, the listener is being perpetually misled. Every time the voice drops the suggestion is conveyed that the sentence has been completed; the listener prepares to hear a new thought, when, suddenly, he realizes that what is being said is a continuation, a development, of the previous remark. Hastily he tries to recall it, and whilst doing so probably misses the next remark, which may be vital to the sentence as a whole: and irritation grows.

Again, not a frame of mind in the audience which is conducive to the success of the play.

Efforts to correct this serious fault in the course of rehearsal frequently result in the permanent acquirement of an unnaturally high key, which is not only unpleasant to listen to, but injurious to the voice; or to a stilted delivery, due to *compelling* the last word to rise in response to incessant

criticism by author or producer, instead of its rising naturally, in due proportion to the rest of the phrase, as it will if the starting pitch be correct.

As a matter of fact, it is very rarely possible to correct this error at rehearsal. It is due to a deep-seated fault in technique, usually faulty breathing, which should have been attended to in the early days of training. Only instruction in voice-production will put it right. Rehearsals are for the preparation and interpretation of the play. No author or producer should have his time wasted in the attempt to correct mistakes which are due to faulty voice-production—even if such a thing were possible—whilst rehearsing.

(*b*) Getting what is called 'the pitch of the theatre' has of course nothing to do with the pitch, that is, the height or lowness of the tone, except in so far as the fact that beginning every phrase on a high note and ending it on a low one prevents it from 'carrying'. Getting the pitch of the theatre depends on getting the right 'wave-length', i.e. the right amount of breath and right length of vowel, together with resonance.

If the actor's voice has been properly trained, it will obey him in rehearsal and in performance. It will automatically give the pitch and intonation necessary for the interpretation of the author's words, and it will automatically get 'the pitch of the theatre'.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MONOTONY

THERE can scarcely be a worse fault in an actor than monotony, for it is of all others the one most calculated to bore and depress an audience. The fact that the monotone is deliberately employed by hypnotists for the purpose of inducing sleep should be sufficient to make actors take serious stock of themselves in this respect.

The first thing to ascertain is whether the monotony complained of is a matter of tone or of pace.

Tonal monotony is perhaps, owing to its being of several kinds, and also—most fatal cause—to lack of ear, the more difficult to eradicate.

I have alluded in the previous chapter to the commonest form, i.e. that due to commencing always on a high note and falling to a low note at the end of a phrase. The effect—besides its interference with the sense by reason of the inaudibility of the last word or two—is exasperatingly monotonous, and no pains should be spared to overcome it.

It should, however, be clearly understood that it can seldom be corrected by 'ear'. Moreover, the endeavour to copy some one who is patterning the right tonality, is liable to cause an artificial, stilted delivery.

Further, it is impossible of correction by these means if the fault is due—as is usually the case—to wrong (i.e. upper chest) breathing, lack of breath management, or faulty attack of tone. It can usually be overcome by means of a few simple breathing exercises, followed by co-ordination work for the respiratory and laryngeal muscles.

I have known of rehearsals being 'held up', and every one rendered nervous and worried by the vain endeavour of the producer to correct this vice, where the trouble has been removed in a few days by a voice trainer—and, mark, without harrying the actor or rendering him self-conscious.

Then there is the monotony arising from lack of inflection. This is more subtle, and not nearly so easy to overcome as the commencing on a high note with its corollary of dropping the voice at the end of phrases or sentences. Monotony of inflection is due to stiff laryngeal muscles. To render these sufficiently supple to produce free range of inflection takes time and patience; indeed, it is practically impossible without the practice of flexibility exercises, which must be carried on day after day with as much regularity as the pianist works at his scales.

Obviously no actor should be left to encounter this inadequacy after his professional career has commenced. It should be attended to during his training. In some cases the difficulty cannot be overcome without the practice of some *singing* exercises. The extraordinary improvement derived from these throws a flood of light, for those unaware of the benefits to the speaking voice of a study of singing, upon the significance of the serious training in singing of the actors of old.

The third form of tonal monotony may justly be called 'drab' tone. It is highly detrimental to the actor, not only because monotony in itself, whatever its cause, is a serious fault, but because it is due to badly formed vowels, which are the result of lack of mouth work. Few things in vocal technique are more to be deplored, for, besides colourless, monotonous tone, there will be no resonance. There can be

neither resonance, brilliance, nor brightness of tone if the vowels are badly formed. By this I mean in particular the absence of that activity of the facial muscles which places the voice well 'forward', at the front of the mouth, and gives good quality of tone, and ability to 'grade' and vary it. I have mentioned elsewhere that this deficiency also involves grave limitation of facial expression, for if the muscles of the lips and cheeks are not flexible enough for proper vowel formation and vowel 'shading', they are equally deficient in the flexibility which is necessary for facial expression.

This form of monotony, and all that pertains to it, is easily overcome by exercises for the soft palate, jaw, tongue, cheeks, and lips. These exercises should not only be taken up early in the actor's training, but they should always be part of his daily practice.

When actors are accused of monotony I think it is usually assumed to be due to one of the above-mentioned *tonal* faults, but as a matter of fact it is equally due to lack of variety of pace.

Music may be rendered brilliantly from the point of view of execution and tonal gradation, but if there be no variety of pace the effect is as monotonous and artificial as that of a piano-organ. Precisely so with speech. There must be variety of pace as well as variety of tone, and here I am afraid the English actor does on the whole deserve censure.

At the same time, it is a pity that comparison is so constantly made between the speed of the French actor, with the inevitable commentary that it is characteristic of him, and the absence of speed in the English actor, together with the equally inevitable commentary that the lack of it is characteristic. It is apt to make the impression that the

presence or absence of this capacity is national and cannot be altered. Whereas any fault that is due to wrong or inadequate muscle action, provided it be not the result of some physical defect which is irremediable, can be overcome by the practice of suitable exercises.

In my opinion the incessant complaints of the English actor's lack of speed have really become a case of 'Give a dog a bad name', &c. The result of telling him time after time that he speaks too slowly is that he becomes imbued with the idea that he possesses no capacity for speed. Consequently he is apt to make exaggerated attempts to remedy the deficiency. It has been so impressed on him that speed is essential that he positively runs away, and appears to lay himself out to see how much he can say in a breath.

Above all, he makes no *gradation* of speed; and whether pace be slow or fast, if it be a *uniform* one the effect must be monotonous. Just as there must be light and shade of tone, so must there be gradations of pace. Lacking this, intelligibility will probably be sacrificed to speed; for unless the muscles of articulation are flexible the consonants will be blurred and the words will run into each other. The difficulty of understanding is usually still further increased by the omission of pauses. The achieving of speed and intelligibility (which, observe, is not the same thing as audibility) depends first, upon breath, second, upon *acceleration*, and, third, upon a high degree of flexibility of jaw, soft palate, tongue, cheeks, and lips.

When speed is attempted before the physical medium is sufficiently agile there is nearly always a loss of rhythm and cadence, as well as of clearness.

The actor who has not had training and experience in the

speaking of verse is usually destitute of rhythm even when speaking at a moderate pace; and when he is required to speak with speed, any rhythm he may have possessed disappears entirely, and his speech becomes jerky and explosive. If there be no rhythm in rapid speaking, it will simply be a rattle, a muddle; and if rhythm be absent from slow speech, it will be funereal.

Even assuming that the necessary agility of muscles has been achieved to make speed and intelligibility possible, there remains another possible cause of monotony, and that is the habit which is all too usual of 'gabbling' the words of a part in memorizing them, without regard to the sense. Nothing could be more mistaken. The tone and inflection —or perhaps it would be more correct to say, the *lack* of inflection—employed when memorizing the words are apt to remain. To 'put the sense in' afterwards is to put the cart before the horse. Many false inflections are 'learnt in', and fixed, in this way, and when the part requires speed, the monotonous gabble with which the words were memorized usually becomes crystallized.

In every branch of technique does the injunction to 'learn to walk before you run' apply, but in none more than in this matter of speed. Lack of flexibility of the respiratory and laryngeal muscles will mean monotony of tone and pace. Attempts at correction without the necessary muscle training—often of muscle *re-education*—usually make matters worse, because they rob the actor of spontaneity.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MUSIC AND THE ACTOR

THE question whether a study of music should form part of the training of the actor can hardly be called a vexed one. It cannot be said to exist. No attempt is made to estimate the value to him of an education in music in childhood and youth, nor to ascertain whether it is desirable to try and make good the lack of it in adult life. At most it is assumed that it may be useful to take singing lessons. But, alas, it is possible to learn to sing without any real musicianship, or even of the most ordinary musical knowledge. The possessor of a voice may have neither 'ear', sense of time, nor feeling for rhythm. He may be unable to read a note and may be incapable of maintaining a part in concerted music. Even those who can read a melody passably may have no knowledge of theory or harmony, and be unable to play an instrument.

This state of things exists to an extent that is astonishing. Not long ago a young actor was sent to me to be taught to sing a song. He had never learnt music, and upon his being able to sing the song depended a good engagement.

On another occasion I was asked by a West End management whether I could suggest any speedy way of teaching a member of the company then rehearsing in a new play to sing a song. The actor, who was thoroughly competent otherwise, had no knowledge of music. A song had been added to his part during rehearsals, and the management was faced by the possibility of having to engage some one

else for the part and to pay a salary to the man who was first engaged.

Only a teacher of singing knows how often fine voices are wasted for lack of musical knowledge. It is surprising how many men there are who cannot read a note of music and who appear to be totally lacking in tonal and rhythmic sense. I say 'appear' advisedly, for the faculty is frequently merely undeveloped. The English tight throat seems often to inhibit 'ear'.

This deficiency is a serious drawback to the actor. It means inability to reproduce inflections and intonation, with its corollary of monotony of tone, and possibly also of rhythm and pace. Indeed, lack of sense of rhythm and time is even commoner than the inability to reproduce tone. This throws a flood of light upon the inability to speak verse.

Incredible as it seems, the old, ridiculous idea still prevails to a not inconsiderable extent that it is waste of time for a boy, or a young man, to occupy himself with music, unless he has so marked a bent for it as to warrant his studying professionally. This 'commercializes' it, and is therefore held to justify it. The idea that music might be a factor in his education, in character-training and efficiency in life, is unknown to the majority.

Most girls learn music for a time as a matter of course, but unless it is to be adopted as a career it is usually dropped on leaving school, or even on emerging from childhood. It is only considered 'worth while' for them if sufficient proficiency is achieved to make it effective as an accomplishment.

The value to the actor of learning to sing may be, and

indeed usually is, a thing quite apart from any consideration of the study of music. It is either taken up because it may be useful to be able to sing a song in a part, or with a view to appearing in musical pieces. Consequently, as good training of the singing voice involves practice of breathing, sustained tone, flexibility, resonance, and diction, it reacts beneficially upon the speaking-voice. This is of course all to the good in the actor's technique, but it does not necessarily imply *study of music*, nor anything that could be called training of the ear.

The person who has not a foundation of musical knowledge is often unaware of the extent to which he depends on the piano and how little tonal certainty and independence he has.

Orchestral players assert that few singers are ever perfectly in tune. This statement may be a little too sweeping, but there is a great deal of truth in it, and it is largely due to the habit of depending upon the piano. The adoption of the piano as the instrument of the home has been disastrous from the point of view of real education in music. You can play wrong notes on the piano, but you cannot play out of tune; consequently it provides no training of the ear comparable with that of a stringed instrument. Moreover, a stringed-instrument player will tell you, probably much to your surprise if your knowledge of musical instruments is limited to the piano, that the piano is 'out of tune'. So in point of fact it is, for on it G sharp and A flat are the same sound, whereas on a stringed instrument there is a difference in pitch between them; slight, no doubt, but still, a difference. A trained ear can detect this, but the singer who knows no instrument but the piano is often unable to do so.

This is the least of its evil effect on tonal perception. Most adults of to-day learnt their singing as children in class, *in unison*, to the accompaniment of the piano—unless they were fortunate enough to learn Tonic Sol-Fa—which means unaccompanied part-singing and ear-training of a very high order. Tonic Sol-Fa develops not only accuracy of pitch and independence of an instrument, but unerring rhythm and ability to keep time.

Where singing is carried out in unison to the accompaniment of a piano, the instrument is leant upon and soon becomes an indispensable crutch. Class singing such as this has no educative value, and the result is that many never develop ear, tonal certainty, independence, sense of time or rhythm.

Fortunately, there is a growing realization of this, and immense improvement has been made of late. But music must take its place as an integral, essential part of education, and the necessary practice must be included in 'prep', instead of being done in play hours.

What happens in our public schools? They have, of course, their musical societies, their orchestras, their chamber music. The standard of performance, and of the music done, is high. As far as it goes, nothing could be better. But how far *does* it go? Can music be said to be regarded as of equal importance with sports, or with other studies? Is it an integral part of education?

An examination of the percentage of boys who study music, and of the time devoted to practice, will show that the answer must be in the negative.

Moreover, practice for individual instruction in any form of music has to be done in play hours.

No public school would maintain for one moment that music is regarded as of equal importance with sports, or of equal value educationally with other studies. *It is only regarded so for boys who show marked leaning or ability in the direction of music.*

The Music Director of one of our public schools said to me: 'It would be idle to pretend that the practice of music in any form is regarded as any sort of necessity, or as a real means to education. A boy takes it or leaves it, and if he takes it he gets a good deal of opportunity. But he *needn't* touch it.' At this school, out of 500 boys, only about 60 learn the piano and a still smaller number learn the violin and other instruments.

It is certainly not taken as a matter of course that every boy learns music. New boys have their *voices* tried, and if they have voice and ear they go into the school choir. But as with adults so with boys. The possession of a voice is a physical incidence and is by no means necessarily accompanied by musicianship, or even by a taste for music.

Boys, as a rule, only learn an instrument at school on request from parents, and the infrequency with which this happens will be seen from the figures I have given.

But a change is taking place in the attitude of education authorities towards music. In June 1927 the Imperial Education Conference devoted a special session to a discussion on 'The place of Music in education'. Sir Henry Hadow, Mus.Doc., who opened the discussion, spoke of the immense value of Music, not only for its healing powers and its profound emotional influence, both of which are fairly generally recognized, but intellectually.

'Music', he said, 'is a language not only as beautiful but

also as complex, as involved and closely reasoned, as the language of Bacon or Shakespeare, and just as worthy of study. Unfortunately it has too long been, like other learned languages, a dead language, known only to the few.'

He might have added that it is studied by far fewer than those who study Greek and Latin.

Dr. Hadow spoke hopefully, however, of the changes that are materializing, and gave it as his opinion that we are reverting to the attitude of our Elizabethan ancestors, who regarded music as of the utmost importance in general education.

Our interest in the Elizabethan period centres mainly in its great literature, and though we know that it was also rich in music I do not think the extent to which the nation as a whole devoted itself to the study and practice of music is realized.

It was an age of music. All ranks pursued it enthusiastically. Thomas Morley, a contemporary of Byrd's, maintained that a man who could not read music at sight and hold his own in part-singing was no gentleman!

Music was considered an essential part of education for both sexes. Byrd, in his *Psalmes, Sonels and Songs*, published in 1583, advanced weighty reasons why every one should learn to sing, and held that it was the way to secure perfect pronunciation, and to make a good public speaker.

An education in music and a study of singing were held to be the best possible training for the actor.

The tones of the speaking voice have no notation, and their very existence seems, judging from the monotony that prevails, not to be realized. The smallest interval recognized in Western Music, till very recently, was a semitone, but a

speaker inflects—or *should* inflect—through all the degrees that lie between the two smallest intervals of music. The Eastern scale possesses 22 degrees. It follows therefore that the East has a finer degree of tone-perception than is possessed by the West: but it is quite possible for Westerns to develop this finer ear. Composers are commencing to use quarter tones in their compositions. Maud MacCarthy, formerly a well-known violinist, can both play and sing the Eastern scale of 22 degrees with perfect accuracy. She has broadcasted this, and Mr. Percy Scholes, the Music Critic to the B.B.C., discussing this remarkable feat, said that he checked her singing of the 22 degrees with the piano and found that she completed the scale in perfect tune, the tiny intervals being quite clear.

Few people know the extent to which a sense of pitch, and the capacity for reproducing sounds with correct intonation, can be developed even in those who are apparently tone-deaf.

My earliest professional experience furnishes a striking illustration of this. A certain well-known Queen's Counsel laboured under the disadvantage of a very poor voice, so weak that it was impossible for every one to hear him in court. The judge was frequently obliged to ask that he should come nearer to him. Then neither jury nor journalists could hear him. The foreman of the jury would beg that he should move nearer to the jury. Then the judge could not hear him. Being a very able man he was briefed despite this drawback, but the annoyance to himself of his inaudibility became so great that he finally consulted a throat specialist, thinking there must be something wrong with his throat. There proved to be nothing amiss with his physical mechan-

ism, and the specialist advised him to go to my father to have his voice trained. He proved to be absolutely tone-deaf. He did not know one tune from another, and only recognized the National Anthem from the fact that people rose to their feet. He was unable to reproduce a sound either from the voice or from an instrument. It was impossible to do anything to improve his voice until 'ear' had been developed, and my father handed him over to me for the necessary instruction. It was no easy matter, especially as his age was about sixty; but after a time perception of tone and ability to reproduce a considerable range of sounds developed sufficiently for his speaking voice to be trained. He was then able to make himself heard in all parts of the court with perfect ease. Moreover, an agreeable singing voice materialized, and he actually learnt to sing some simple songs!

Again and again I meet with similar cases. Is it any wonder therefore that speech is monotonous and good rendering of verse rare?

When we recall the extent to which the plays of the Elizabethan period were written in verse we shall realize the connexion between the high standard of speech that prevailed then and the fact that music was an integral part of education.

A renascence is undoubtedly taking place at the present time in Music, Acting, and the Speaking of Verse. In the Elizabethan period these were a Trinity. If we can restore them to the position they occupied then, the Drama will live again.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHOULD THE ACTOR FEEL EMOTION?

OF all the many vexed questions pertaining to dramatic art none has been so much debated, and to so little purpose, as that of whether the actor should himself feel the emotion he is depicting.

By bringing together some of the theories of leading psychologists and critics and comparing them with accounts of the actual experiences of great actors we may be able to arrive at some idea of the facts.

So impressed was the late William Archer by the need to sift this matter thoroughly and to establish once and for all whether actors really feel the emotion they are expressing that he formulated a catechism on the subject and sent it out to leading Continental and English actors. He published their answers in his book *Masks or Faces*; but though the results were carefully analysed and tabulated the inquiry proved abortive.

Referring to it in *The Times* in December 1925 in a discussion on 'Histrionic Psychology', the late Mr. Walkley, commenting on the conflicting nature of the responses to Mr. Archer's inquiries, which were in many instances in flat contradiction of each other, gave it as his opinion that actors' evidence in the matter must be ruled out altogether.

'Self-analysis', wrote Mr. Walkley, 'is a difficult feat for any of us, and particularly for the actor, whose very business it is to be not an analyst but a synthetist. He has to grow his parts, not to tear them up by the roots to see how they are growing.'

This pronouncement begs the question. It is not so much a matter of getting the actor to 'tear up his parts by the roots' and examine the 'process of growing', but of seeking an exposition from him of the methods by which he expresses emotion.

It is necessary to ascertain whether he actually experiences that emotion himself, either prior to performance, or at the time of performance, and to tabulate and compare not *contradictions* in experience—which is what usually most occupies the psychologist—but *similarity* of experience, and to note how it works out in the performances and staying-power of actors whose work we either know or have trustworthy account of.

In this catechism, however, *only actors* were approached, and in the various revivals of the question only the opinions of critics and psychologists appear to have been sought. I do not by the use of the word 'only' imply anything derogatory, for it would certainly seem that they, together with the actor himself, should be qualified to judge. But the view of the expert who above all is most able to weigh the pros and cons of this perplexing matter was not sought. The opinion of the teacher, trainer, and dramatic mentor is surely needed also, for he it is who guides the actor and disentangles for him the network of cause and effect.

As Mr. Walkley pointed out, self-analysis is especially difficult for the actor, particularly in regard to the feeling and expressing of emotion. The critic, whose business it is to appraise performance, is not necessarily in a position to project his mind into the processes that lie behind it, which have their roots in the past, only flowering in performance. The matter lies essentially between the actor and his guide

and mentor, and when we realize its complexity we can appreciate the value of the close personal terms that existed between the trainer and the young actor in former times.

The foregoing quotation from Mr. Walkley formed part of a discussion on an attempt to analyse Histrionic Psychology by modern experts with particular reference to the James-Lange theory that the physical simulation of an emotion tends actually to *produce* that emotion in the person simulating it. The theory according to the James-Lange law was that the actor, by the aid of his sympathetic imagination and of behaviour, arouses the actual emotional content of the character imagined by the author, and impersonates, nay, more, *identifies* himself with the character.

After discussing this theory Mr. Walkley went on to make the definite, unequivocal statement that 'the good actor not only feels his part, *he lives it.* He speaks its speech . . . he experiences its emotions, he behaves with its behaviour, and he is in the thick of a combined action every detail of which persuades him that *he is his part and not himself'*. (The italics are mine.)

A startling theory indeed. We will examine presently how it would work out.

Both critics and psychologists proved to be as much at variance with each other on the matter as were the actors, and the discussion cannot be said to have thrown much light on the subject; indeed, actors who followed it must have found themselves more mystified at the end of it than they had been to start with.

Professor Charles Myers, however, stated definitely—and the pronouncement is of especial interest and value from so eminent a psychological authority—that *actors who lose*

themselves in their parts cease in so doing to be true artists; but he also said that actors who claim that they experience none of the emotions which they strive to express are generally not the best actors. He frankly admitted that psychology cannot explain how it is possible for those actors who stand midway between these two classes to feel the part they are playing, whilst looking upon themselves throughout as having those feelings.

Dr. Harold Dearden had stated his view that the main psychological mechanism involved in acting is that of Suggestion, though he was careful, after showing how Suggestion works in cases of hysteria, to add that hysteria and histrionics have nothing in common save the mechanism of Suggestion which underlies them both.

Whereupon Professor Myers pointed out that the actor might reasonably resent comparison with the hysterical, and questioned the desirability of the use of the term 'Suggestion' in view of its applying to them both in such widely different senses.

Then came a most impressive communication from Sir Frederick Mott, entitled *The Actor and his Part*, in which he quoted from a paper he had read before the Society of English singers on 'The Psychic Mechanism of Voice in Relation to the "Emotions"'.

The analysis is of profound interest, and the experiments with the psycho-galvanometer completely dispose of the vexed question as to whether the actor is actually experiencing the emotion he is expressing. Sir Frederick Mott said:

'Every true artist has æsthetic feeling; but he must exercise control of this feeling, for an emotion strongly felt is liable to produce commotion in consciousness and thus interfere with

its action as the censor controlling the automatic subconscious psychic mechanism, upon which the successful vocal technique of the artist depends. Such loss of control is very liable to cause imperfections of vocalization, especially faulty intonation, for in anger the pitch of the voice naturally tends to rise, and in fear to fall and the voice to choke. Moreover, he is liable to forget the words. Rather he should aim at keeping a control over his feelings so that his technique does not suffer, and yet be able to arouse in his audience the emotions which he expresses. Thus the art of dramatic singing and acting lies in concealing the art, and the master singer, like the great actor, by the modulation of the voice, by his expression and gestures, feeling himself little or no organic internal disturbance, the essential part of a strong emotion, can nevertheless by his art arouse in the expectant audience that part of the emotion which he does not portray, and probably does not feel, at any rate intensely—namely, the quickening or slowing of the pulse and respiration, the emotional thrill or shudder of the spine, pallor and coldness or redness and warmth of the skin, tears and various other manifestations of bodily disturbance.

'A confirmation of the opinion I expressed was afforded four years later at the Maudsley Hospital when Dr. Golla and I had the opportunity of testing some actresses by means of the psycho-galvanometer. The recitation of "soul-stirring pieces" did not move the mirror of the galvanometer, whereas the fear-effect of an unexpected loud noise caused a characteristic galvanic response. It is true, of course, that we have no knowledge of emotion necessitating a galvanic response, but inasmuch as we have never seen an undoubted emotion, occurring in a normal person, without a reaction and have invariably failed to obtain any reaction by volition processes, Dr. Golla and I think it is a fair test for the presence or absence of emotion.'

Thus the scientists. It will be seen that on the whole they differed as much as the actors themselves.

Which view shall we accept—the one that postulates the actor not only as feeling the emotion he is expressing at the time of the actual performance, but as *becoming* the part he is playing and being no longer himself?

Or shall we accept the view of Sir Frederick Mott that whilst every true artist feels, he must exercise control of feeling; in fact, that *by his art* he can arouse in his audience 'that part of the emotion which he does not portray, and *probably does not* feel' at the time of performance?

Even without the proof thereof, afforded by the psycho-galvanometer, which we owe to the marvellous developments of modern science—(who would have dreamt that the experiencing of emotion would be registered one day by an instrument, so affording *ocular* proof of it, for 'seeing is believing', we know!)—I think commonsense would prompt most of us to accept Sir Frederick Mott's view.

And if I am told that one expert is as good as another, and am asked who is to decide 'when doctors differ'; if I am admonished for choosing the one whose pronouncement gives official sanction to my own opinions and preferences, I reply that 'onlookers see the most of the game', and that in the end commonsense must be the arbiter. And if the term 'common' were not part of this word, if it were 'rare-sense', or some expression denoting the superlative, we should be more inclined to trust to it.

But fortunately this miracle of modern times, the psycho-galvanometer, affords the proof required by many, and the matter is really placed thereby beyond argument. In the

light of it, a review of some of the opinions and experiences of great actors will gain fresh interest.

Coquelin was emphatic that an actor should not feel his part. Salvini, on the other hand, maintained that unless the actor experiences intimately whatever befits the diverse characters and passions he represents he can never thoroughly transfuse into the hearts of his audience the sentiment of the situation.

Ristori was said to throw 'her whole passionate soul into her emotional scenes, because she knew that her technique would never desert her'.

Yet, that abandonment to actual experience of the emotion depicted cannot be done with impunity, even by a consummate master of technique such as Ristori, is evidenced by the fact that on one occasion she was so carried away by a tremendous scene that at the end of it she fell exhausted and unconscious, so near the footlights that she would have been burnt had not some one in the audience dragged her away.

It is easy to see the danger, if not of actual physical injury, that must result from an abandonment night after night to the actual experience of great emotion.

The American actress, Clara Morris, is said to have had breakdown after breakdown in health, finally doing herself irretrievable harm, by working herself up to an abandonment in the expression of emotion.

G. H. Lewes' warning in this matter should be read and pondered over by those who think they are 'not acting' unless they actually feel the emotion they are depicting. He said:

'If an actor really felt what he feigns he would be unable

to withstand the wear and tear of such emotion repeated night after night, but it is indisputable to those who know anything of art that the mere presence of emotion would be such a disturbance of the intellectual equilibrium as entirely to frustrate artistic expression. . . . If the actor were really in a passion his voice would be a scream, his gestures wild and disorderly, he would present a painful, not an æsthetic, spectacle.'

It is probable that one of the factors underlying the Puritan dread of the stage was this mistaken idea that acting involved abandonment to emotion and consequently the wrecking of the actor's *morale.* Dr. Johnson was no doubt mocking at the absurdity of the idea when he remarked that if an actor who was taking the part of a murderer really felt his part he would deserve to be hanged every night. Which may be a *reductio ad absurdum*, but has nevertheless a very real truth in it which should serve to expose the fallacy and unsoundness of such a method of acting.

'How entirely opposed to all the purposes of art and all the secrets of effect would be the representation of passion in its *real* rather than its symbolical expression;' said Lewes. 'The red, swollen, and distorted features of grief, the harsh, screaming intonation of anger, are unsuited to Art. All Art is symbolical. If it presented emotion in its real expression it would cease to move us as art; sometimes cease to move us at all, or move us only to laughter.'

And then, on this vexed question of how far the actor should feel what he is expressing:

'He is in a state of emotional excitement sufficiently strong to furnish him with the elements of expression, but not strong enough to prevent his modulating the one and arranging the

other according to a preconceived standard. His passion must be ideal, sympathetic, not personal. . . . His looks and gestures, his position in the picture, all will be out of proportion and fail of their due effect unless he is master of himself.'

The following remark sums up and epitomizes the whole matter: *If the actor really feel he cannot act, but he cannot act unless he feel.* And in this paradox lies the truth.

If the actor really feel emotion *when he is depicting it* he is not master of himself. He may have been so carried away in one act as to have become hoarse, red-eyed, swollen-featured, and quite unfit to appear in the next act, the absurdity of which will be apparent when it is realized that an interval of years may have elapsed between the two acts.

How would an actor playing *Othello* get through Acts IV and V if he really expressed all he felt up to Act III?

An actor may even knock himself up for a considerable period, or be out of the cast with laryngitis, owing to the strain on his throat of tearing a passion to tatters. There was a case to my certain knowledge not long ago when a leading actor, who was playing a part which made considerable demands on him vocally, was liable to complete loss of voice due to 'forcing' in his big scenes. So an actor of considerable experience had to be retained at no small cost to play whenever he was *hors de combat*—the part being of too great importance for it to be policy to allow an understudy to appear so often.

But, and here lies the explanation of the problem that has been so much debated, the actor *must* have felt his part when studying it, and must have abandoned himself fully to its emotion. Then when performing it all the mechanism of the emotion will be produced automatically without in the

smallest degree affecting his complete control over himself. It has been noted again and again that when the actor has been least moved by the emotion he is expressing his audience has been most affected, and they have thought he must be completely exhausted by the storms he has been depicting.

This was Calvert's view. He said:

'In the rehearsing we may do in private it is perhaps well to give way to uncontrolled passion, to develop our power of expressing it; but while acting we must always remain master of our resources.'

Duse certainly realized this. On one occasion when she was going to play 'Odette', she was found shaking with emotion and with the tears streaming down her face. In answer to anxious inquiries as to whether some tragedy had befallen her she said:

'I am doing "Odette", this evening, and if I don't unburden myself a bit I shall cry too much during the fourth act—and I'm afraid the audience might make fun of me. The fourth act has always bothered me. For if I haven't the time to cry beforehand I can't play it.'

Geneviève Ward's experience was precisely the same.

'I have been obliged when studying a part,' she said, 'to stop owing to the tears and sobs, and would not have attempted to play it until I could control my feelings. I find that I feel much more when alone than before my audience. Then I must make *them* feel—control myself to control them.'

Innumerable cases could be cited corroborating this all-important matter, but I need not multiply instances.

Before leaving the question of emotion, however, there is one other vexed point I should like to refer to, and that is the matter of actual tears on the stage.

This falls into a different category from that of the experiencing of emotion when depicting it, for it is an undoubted fact that tears are frequently shed on the stage when not the slightest emotion is felt by the actor. If they are the direct outcome of emotion which is being experienced during performance they of course come under the ban we have just discussed; but it may quite well be argued that if they are part of the automatic presentment of emotion which leaves the actor unshaken, complete master of himself, they are surely not only permissible but desirable.

This is more than doubtful. To begin with, the actor's power to move his audience is in no way bound up with, or in proportion to, his capacity to shed actual tears. To go on with—and this is the real point at issue—it arouses a certain curiosity and detached interest in the phenomenon as such which has nothing to do with the emotion of which the tears are supposed to be a manifestation.

'Real tears!' comments some one excitedly. 'Look!'—audibly to her companion—(Yes, I think the speaker would be a woman) 'Look! She's crying real tears—fancy!'

And the friend rejoins, possibly facetiously; 'Poor dear, so she is. She *is* taking it to heart, isn't she!'

And neither the curiosity nor the facetiousness are manifestations which a scene of emotion should arouse.

Moreover, there is always the risk, indeed, the probability, that the make-up will not withstand the flow of tears. And what can be more ludicrous and more likely to destroy all illusion and emotion than the sight of a face streaked with black from the eyes?

I remember seeing Olga Brandon in *Castle*, with heavy black smears all down her cheeks. She wept copiously night

after night till not only was her make-up ruined but her eyes and nose were swollen and red. I saw her performance several times, and on each occasion I heard exclamations of surprise at the real tears. This is not the effect that should be produced on the audience.

Curiously enough, the capacity to weep real tears without facial disfigurement is usually an attribute of deficient rather than of excessive feeling, a fact which was commented on by Fanny Kemble, who remarked that, 'in such persons the tears are poured from their crystal cups without muscular contortion of the face'.

It must have been exceptional creatures such as these who were described by a certain type of Victorian novelist. One does not seem to have met them in real life.

It will be agreed on consideration of these facts that the shedding of real tears on the stage is to be deprecated. Further, it seems clear that actors should not permit themselves to be carried away by emotion when acting, but that in *studying* a part they should allow themselves to enter into it to the fullest possible extent, and should give free rein to the imagination. The actor should do everything in his power to cultivate a sense of character, always testing himself with the greatest care as to the sincerity of his reproduction by endeavouring to project himself into all the circumstances and environment of the character he is interpreting—(mark, *interpreting*, not impersonating) and he should ask himself again and again how *he* would feel and look and act were it in truth himself. He should allow himself, when studying the part, to be swept away by the rage, passion, sorrow, jealousy—whatever the emotion may be—should allow his breath to 'catch', his voice to break, the

tears to come. Then, if his breathing, his voice, his face, in short, the whole of his physical mechanism be trained, and be really plastic, and under control, he may rest assured that all the effect of the emotion which he has experienced to the utmost during his study will express itself automatically when he is acting, leaving him controlled and master of himself. Then, and only then, will he really sway his audiences, who will be convinced, as were Garrick's friends, that they could not have been witnessing 'acting' because it seemed to them the actual expression of the man's own emotion.

But only by long, patient work, and by complete mastery of technique, will the highest rank of emotion be reached, the spirit of the innermost released, and the artist set free to create and to express.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DRAMATIC REVIVAL

IT is no exaggeration to say that a great dramatic revival is taking place in England, spreading throughout the country with a rapidity and enthusiasm which are remarkable. If any one doubt this let him procure and study the *Report* issued in 1926 by the Adult Education Committee of the Board of Education on 'The Drama in Adult Education'.

The mere fact in itself that the Board of Education considers the Drama a sufficiently ponderable factor in education to warrant the appointment of a Committee to investigate the subject, and to approve the publication of its finding, fully justifies those who for so many years past, at first a mere handful, but steadily augmenting in number and weight of opinion, have maintained their faith in the potentiality of the Drama—and when I say of the Drama I mean the actor as well as the play—despite adverse conditions that have seemed wellnigh insuperable.

That no small degree of faith has been needed is evidenced in the drastic nature of much of the criticism on the Theatre of the last decade. Take, for instance, Mr. Granville Barker's statement in *The Exemplary Theatre* that

> 'There is no such thing as a theatre in England', and that 'it would be affectation to pretend that the average theatrical performances to be seen in London have any but the slenderest connexion with anything that can be called art, or philosophy or culture'.

Those who could find no arguments to justify their faith may rejoice; for, with the suddenness and fervour of a

religious revival, the theatre is 'coming alive' all over the country. London alone—or rather Central London—turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to the revival. Strange that the greatest art centre in the world should persistently maintain a commercial attitude towards the art of the theatre! London does not appear to realize the importance of the Drama in the life of the nation. She ignores the heritage of her glorious dramatic past.

In the Elizabethan era all dramatic interests focused in London. In London the traditions of the English stage were formed and nurtured. There might be plenty of dramatic entertainment in the country, but London was the front of it all.

Why has she fallen from her place of pride?

Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, maintains that the Theatre is 'as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages', and much more important than the Church was in London during the period covered by his criticism.

'Church-going in London', he says, 'has been largely replaced by playgoing. This would be a very good thing if the theatre took itself seriously as a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armoury against despair and dulness, and a temple of the Ascent of Man.'

Arguments such as these have been employed again and again. Condemnation, ridicule, exhortation, alike have failed to induce Central London to support plays of high quality. Nor does it seem any more probable that Central London will be affected by the pronouncement of the Report of the Adult Education Committee that

'the drama can be, under right conditions, a most potent instrument of moral, artistic and intellectual progress, and under wrong conditions an equally potent instrument of moral, artistic and intellectual degradation'.

Central London asks nothing more from its theatre than amusement of the very lightest character.

'I go to the theatre to be amused: I don't want to be made to think. I don't regard the theatre as a place where my education is to be carried on', it would say.

Those who hold this view, however, overlook the fact that the theatre should be a tonic. It should stimulate us to be up and doing. It should 'uplift' us—with apologies for the use of this much-abused word. Certainly amusement—and light amusement, too—is necessary, but of far more benefit in the majority of cases is the tonic which rouses us to throw off trouble and depression, to become mentally alert.

One of the witnesses who gave evidence before the Adult Education Committee of the Board of Education on the value of the drama in adult education, related that a working man who had taken part in a Shakespearian performance said:

'Eh, I've been miles away from myself to-night, and I feel pounds lighter for it.'

This is the supreme test. Have we been taken 'miles away from ourselves'? Do we feel 'pounds lighter', more ready to shoulder the burden of life, more tolerant, more ready to understand and to help, more cheery and courageous, by our theatre-going? Or have we been bored or depressed? Have we left the theatre more weary than we entered it? Have the lower emotions been appealed to? Has the laughter been honest and unashamed? The theatre stands appraised

at its exact worth in accordance with the answer that can be given truthfully to these questions.

Let those who have lost heart turn to the *Report* from which I have quoted.

Its value is immense, for it is the first official attempt to analyse the nature of Dramatic Art, to review its history and development, its present condition, its relation to Adult Education and to the churches, to ascertain its position in educational institutions, to tabulate its professional and non-professional manifestations in towns and villages, to note the choice and appreciation of plays, to deal with the matter of teachers and producers, and to discuss the arguments for the establishment of a National Theatre. The Committee examined a large number of witnesses who came from all parts of the country to give evidence, liberal extracts from which appear in the *Report* and will be found of extraordinary interest.

The first conclusion arrived at was:

'That there is no section of the community to which the drama has not an immediate and compelling appeal. When this element of attraction is considered in connexion with an earlier conclusion reached by us, in considering the drama as a form of art, that it is at once a most vivid and most subtle artistic medium, and therefore a powerful instrument for the conveyance of ideas, it becomes apparent that the conditions under which drama is presented are a matter of the greatest interest to all who are interested in Education. In the drama we find an instrument which can be directed to the highest ends, and to the lowest.'

The *Report* makes it quite clear that the Committee has endeavoured to ascertain through the examination of the

various issues raised by those who gave evidence before them *what are the elements in the present situation which 'all persons interested in Education must desire to encourage and support'.*

It will at once be realized what a vast change, offering far-reaching possibilities, is here indicated; for whereas in the last decade a large proportion of thoughtful people had given up theatre-going, these very people are now adjured to encourage and support the Drama *because of its value in Education.* It is not a question of being exhorted to attend theatres with the object of betterment, of the acquirement of knowledge, of raising mental or moral tone. The evidence laid before the Committee shows that the interest displayed throughout the country has literally been that of 'Art for Art's sake', for the enjoyment and exhilaration derived therefrom.

The outstanding fact in connexion with the wave of interest in the Drama that has spread all over the country is that the plays which are making the greatest appeal are not of the lighter type. They are not Revue, Musical Comedy, Detective Drama, or Farce, but those of the highest order, i.e. Greek Plays, and Shakespeare, with, of present-day authors, Shaw, Masefield, Drinkwater, Lascelles Abercrombie, and the Irish School of dramatists, as leading favourites. Moreover, appreciation of Greek drama is by no means confined, as might have been expected, to university centres, schools, and to the 'intellectuals', but is found to make strong appeal to the poorer classes, not only in towns but in villages.

Eye-witnesses declare that the enthusiasm displayed by performers and audience, both drawn largely from the people, is in the highest degree remarkable. Any one who

has not heard of the vivid interest displayed in the Greek drama by the working classes should read the account in the Blue Book of the history of the Stoneland Players. For many years two to four or five Greek plays annually have been presented by a company mainly composed of country folk in a small village in Sussex, and they have been rehearsed and performed in a spirit of reverent enthusiasm which has been compared with that evoked by the Passion Play at Oberammergau. The plays 'are treated as a serious matter; there is no joking or trifling at performances, and no jealousy, but rather a spirit of loyalty to the community'.

The interesting fact was adduced that though the villagers enjoyed Shakespeare, and modern comedy, and any good play if it was well acted, *they got far less tired of frequent rehearsals of a Greek play than of a modern one.* Moreover, they actually found Greek plays easier to understand than Shakespeare. Again and again those who had played important parts in Shakespeare or in modern plays preferred the smallest part, or even to be one of the crowd, in the Greek plays. Mrs. Godwin King, who founded the Stoneland Players, attributes this to their strong direct emotional quality, which is to some extent akin to a religious appeal.

No difficulty was ever experienced in getting people to take part in them. Even in the summer, boys and men who usually played cricket, or worked in their gardens in the evenings, came without fail to rehearsals. The village choral society, composed of women, co-operated by chanting the Greek choruses. Practically the entire community was concerned in them in some way or other. There was no drilling or dragooning of the performers. Mrs. Godwin King never attempted to dictate gesture or intonation. She

trained them to speak and to act intelligently, with the result that the sense and emotion were expressed spontaneously, from the heart. There was no desire for personal display or glorification. The same plays were given again and again, the actors changing parts, or being perfectly happy to be amongst the crowd—which is surely the pre-eminent characteristic of the true actor who has the good of the play as a whole at heart.

This has often been noted at Bayreuth, and in the Meiningen Company, where a singer or actor who played the leading part one night would be found the next night in a quite minor role.

This point is worth emphasizing, for the amateur in art has been derided, frequently most unjustly. His interest in acting has been ascribed to vanity, to a desire for personal display and the applause of friends, or to an excuse for social functions. His acting has been regarded as having no relation to art; indeed, as being little more than feeble imitation of popular actors in West-End successes. That a considerable percentage of amateur performance in the past has been open to criticism of this kind is no doubt perfectly true, but an examination of the Blue Book reveals a very different state of affairs now. All over the country amateur societies have been formed, which give performances of plays of high quality, to the carrying out of which such seriousness of purpose is applied and such high standards maintained as to constitute a new dramatic movement.

Let us recall that Mr. Bernard Shaw, writing as far back as 1895 about the amateur actor, said:

'I am beginning to cling to him as the saviour of theatrical art.'

Komisarjevsky is of the same opinion. Writing in 1929 he said:

'It is possible that the Renaissance of the Theatre will come through the amateurs, whose keenness, disinterestedness, unselfishness and sincerity is so necessary for the Professional Theatre to-day.'

These prophecies seem to be on the eve of fulfilment. It was stated recently that there are nearly nine thousand amateur dramatic societies in this country. The affiliation of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association increased in the period 1922–6 from 394 societies to 760.

The British Drama League, whose aim it is to assist the development of the Art of the Theatre, and to promote a right relation between Drama and the life of the community, numbers something like a thousand branches, scattered all over the country, representing thousands of play lovers and play actors, united in the common purpose of promoting the best interests of the stage.

A movement that has reached such magnitude and such organization throughout the country can neither be ignored nor belittled. It is proof positive of the reality of the Revival, and nothing could be more mistaken than to decry the movement because it is non-professional.

The growth of the Village Drama Society is equally remarkable. It started in an isolated village in Devonshire, and in the space of eight years it expanded steadily, till in its eighth year the number of its branches had increased from 146 to 210. It is in touch with upwards of 3,000 villages, animated, says its Honorary Secretary, Miss Mary Kelly, 'by a genuine movement of self-development, and not an artistic veneer':—and Miss Kelly notes that 'there is un-

doubtedly a real dramatic sense in country people, *especially strong where they are farthest from the theatre*',

So no accusation can be made here of imitation. A very high standard obtains in the plays done. Summer Schools are organized for the training of producers. Children's performances are given with a seriousness and attention to detail worthy of the professional theatre. Plays for children, of higher aim than has obtained heretofore, are sought for, and in general the dramatic standard is steadily rising. Children of all ages are giving performances that are astonishing in their sincerity, fervour, and finish.

Our public schools have of course always had dramatic performances, but their activities have increased of late in a remarkable manner. They present the great tragedies in such a way as to warrant press comment as serious as that given to professional companies.

Then there are performances in aid of charities of 'adult' plays by the children of well-known actors and actresses, all indicative of the roots that are being made in the growth of this dramatic revival.

Very significant also is the establishing of Children's Theatres.

History, we know, repeats itself. The Children's Companies of the Elizabethan era were literally the cradle of the great actors and the source of inspiration for practically all the great dramatists of the period. So we are justified in drawing a powerful augury of good from the establishment of Children's Theatres, and from the big development of organized acting that is taking place amongst children of all classes throughout the kingdom.

The fear has been expressed that this extraordinary

growth of amateur acting will injure the professional theatre. If the community in general is occupied in acting, it is not likely to want to go and see professionals act, appears to be the argument.

Those who imagine this would be reassured by a study of stage conditions in the Elizabethan era. Not only did the professional theatre rise to supreme heights, both in the evolution of the playwright and the actor, *but amateur manifestations were equally remarkable.* Schools, universities, and the Court were occupied actively in dramatic performances, as were also the lower classes. Professor Ashley Thorndike, commenting on this sixteenth-century non-professional activity in his book *Shakespeare's Theatre*, says:

'Every schoolmaster was a Holofernes, and many a band of English mechanics had a histrionic leader in some "Bottom". The situation might be compared with athletics in England during the last generation or two. At first reserved mainly for the upper classes and schools, and a few professionals employed by them, dramatics soon became the employment and interest of the general public, which, as in the case of football, soon preferred the part of an audience, but supported professionals of increasing prowess. Indeed, the professional actors in the 16th Century relied on an appreciative public interest not unlike that which professional athletes receive to-day in Great Britain and the United States.'

Obviously the fact that such an enormous public has taken to acting must necessarily bring a new focus of interest upon dramatic art, for it undoubtedly includes a large number of people who have in the past decade been non-theatre-going. Acting, as Mr. Granville Barker re-

marked in *The Exemplary Theatre*, is a very subtle, sensitive art which demands *trained appreciation.*

'What stimulus', he asks, 'is it to an actor to appear before judges, the expertest of whom can hardly tell, so to speak, a bad part from a good performance? What encouragement is it to a man to cultivate the niceties of restraint and delicate workmanship if, by the end of his career, no one but himself and a few of his colleagues are to be the wiser of his achievement? Few things can debauch an art so much as the lack of any decent standard of public taste.'

It follows that if we have a large proportion of the community abstaining from theatre-going, either from lack of interest in it, or because the plays or the acting do not satisfy them, and if the public that does go to the theatre is satisfied with musical comedy, farce, detective, or 'freak' plays, the art is being debauched by the lack of a proper standard of taste.

A very different state of affairs is materializing now. It seems as though precisely this large proportion of the population that has not been going to the theatre has taken to acting itself, with extraordinary ardour. Those who have not come into touch with community drama will probably be very much astonished to find what a high standard has been set up, how seriously parts are studied, and how remarkable the 'team work' is.

Mr. St. John Ervine commenting on the high standard of performance that obtained in the National Festival of Community Drama, said:

'All the actors enunciated clearly, even when they were speaking in dialect. They knew how to stand still. There was

scarcely any fussiness in the acting or the production, nor were any of the movements irrelevant. Some of the players spoke in too intimate a key, *but nevertheless they could be heard.*'

The italics are mine, for I wish to emphasize that if they were heard when speaking in 'too intimate a key' their voice-production and diction must have been of a very high order indeed. It must not be imagined that this was coincidence, or the result of inborn unaided genius for speech and movement. Serious training and hard work of a kind that would surprise many in the professional world are carried out by these Community players. Organizers of many of the productions frequently go to considerable expense and trouble to come to London to study with leading teachers. Sometimes they pay out of their own pockets to send members of the Company up for coaching and instruction too; and, when the play under rehearsal is, say, a Shakespearian one, they will send them to see any performance of it that is being given professionally. This has come under my own notice again and again, and the comments made by village players who have never before seen Shakespeare acted are most interesting, frequently illuminating, in the freshness of their point of view.

Consequently, not only are the comprehension and appreciation of the art of acting which are vital to the actor developing rapidly, but it is evident that they are already reacting upon the drama itself, as Mr. Granville Barker prophesied they would do.

'Bring the drama,' he wrote, 'as an Art, and a means of education, into touch with the *normal life of the community,* and it will develop rationality as a virtue and a strength.'

It must of necessity follow that with hundreds of non-professional, non-commercial societies studying and producing works of art, for the love of the thing, a large public is being created which will bring real interest and apprehension of the drama and of the subtle and sensitive art of acting to the professional theatre.

We shall find, just as was the case in former days, that the burning enthusiasm of the amateur will react upon the professional. Professor Thorndike, discussing the development of dramatic art in the sixteenth century, says:

'The professionals soon developed a technique and repertory of their own, but *amateur acting* had made it inevitable that the repertory should be extensive and the technique daring.'

So must it ever be in all executive arts. The highest manifestation must emanate from the trained professional who has devoted his life to its exposition; but unless we have a body of amateurs working at an art for the love of it, educating themselves by means of their own endeavours at self-expression through its medium, we shall have no public to appreciate the professional artist and to pay to see him perform. The more seriously does the amateur study any form of art-expression, the more surely is the audience being created which will be able to appreciate, and be stimulated by, the professional. To fear the amateur betrays a total lack of comprehension of the facts—a lack of realization that each is necessary to the other. That this fear does exist is undoubted, and it is vitally necessary that it should be dispelled.

This extraordinary manifestation of non-professional interest in the drama and in the art of acting is precisely what is going to revivify the professional theatre, provided that

the professional theatre can respond. A big public is being created for the professional theatre. If great plays and great acting are to be seen on the professional stage it cannot be otherwise than that these keen 'prentice hands will flock to the theatre. Great plays require great acting, and great acting is called forth by great plays, given that the actor *is* an actor, master of the technique of his art, and not a mere marionette chosen because his own personality is that of the character in the play.

How *can* there be free development of dramatic genius when there is, first, insufficient training, second, the placing of untrained people on the stage on the strength of having the right appearance and characteristics for the part in question, and, third, when leading actors are tied up in successful plays that have long runs? For, however great the actor, his art *must* suffer by playing the same part night after night indefinitely. Even if the play be a great one artists admit that they cannot maintain a high standard of performance throughout an unbroken long run.

Miss Thorndike tells us that though 'Saint Joan' is her favourite part she could not have played it for over a year had she not done other work in the meantime.

In John Barrymore we get an echo of Macready in this respect, both having withdrawn plays that were still at the height of success because they felt themselves growing 'stale'. Though Barrymore speaks of 'Hamlet' as the only part that is always fresh to him he says he cannot play him eight times a week for many weeks in succession. As few artists are in a position to change their programme when they have played a part too long it is easy to see how staleness must perforce set in for many. Mr. Granville Barker

goes so far as to say that the art of acting in England has been wellnigh destroyed by the long run, for it has reduced it to automatism.

As for the actor who has been transplanted from drawing-room to stage and has no background of the technique which is the result of training and experience he has nothing wherewith to counteract the effect of long runs. He becomes more and more stereotyped, and when the play at last comes to an end he is—if he has 'made a success'—Thespis save us!—engaged for a precisely similar part in another production.

It must be perfectly obvious that these are not the conditions that will develop great acting.

Great hopes have been entertained from the Repertory Theatres, and at first sight it would certainly seem as though they would provide the necessary school of experience for the actor and enable him to develop to the full his dramatic potentialities. Never, it might be thought, since the time of the Circuits and the 'Stock' company, has the actor had such chances of wide and varied experience in plays of high aim as now in the numerous Repertory companies. Here, one would think, is the really practical school of experience in which the actor may develop his powers, perfect his technique, and then pass, with his store of experience gathered from playing a wide range of parts, keyed up and stimulated by constant changes of programme and intensive rehearsals, to London, to which he has earned the right, just as did the actor of old. Though, however, the existence of the modern Repertory Theatre is a hopeful sign, and a confirmation, if confirmation were needed, of the fact that the spirit which made the actor of former days is still there, we must

not assume that it provides the necessary conditions for its development.

It is impossible for the actor to master the technique of his art, to acquire control and finish, ease and certainty, under the rush of rehearsing and producing a new play every week. He has no time to 'settle down' to a part, to feel his feet, and to develop and enrich his performance. The rendering he gives on the first night, after what is necessarily insufficient rehearsal, must remain; for his mind is occupied and every moment of his time given to rehearsing the next play to be done; and so on with the next.

What is wanted to enable the full advantage to be reaped of the Repertory system is, first, the linking up with each other of groups of Repertory Theatres, and then, that they should be associated with an Art Theatre in London, where once a year a Repertory Festival should be held in which Repertory Companies from all over the country should take part. At intervals a 'guest' from some of the latter should be invited to come and take part in a performance with the London Company—a thing that would be quite feasible when well-known masterpieces were being done. As we know, this plan obtains all over the Continent; it works with success there. Why not here? It would be the means of breaking down the 'ring-fence' that surrounds the London stage. It would be an immense stimulus to the theatrical profession and a source of great interest to the public.

There are millionaires who could give us such a theatre, *and* endow it, vesting its control in a body of representative men who would safeguard its aims and ideals. Incorporated with it should be a Theatre Training School for the actor, which should include a school of scenic design where the

scenery for the productions would be made by the students. There should also be a school of costume, where not only the history of costume would be studied, but stuffs would be dyed and the dresses made for 'period' plays, where the properties would be made by the students, where in short the entire business of the productions would be carried out by the students.

An Art Theatre will require scenery of imaginative quality, and dresses and properties of beauty and originality; consequently the 'crafts' side of the actor's profession could be acquired simultaneously with his training. This would contribute materially to make the proposition a sound one by cutting down the expenses of production, and would go far to render the enterprise self-supporting. The gain to the student and to the young actor would be immense. It is a weak spot in the profession of the actor that he seldom shares in the constructive side of his art. Under such a plan, a unity, a working together for the good of the play, a pride in taking part in its equipment and 'mechanics', would be developed that must inevitably be of incalculable value to the art as a whole as well as to the actor himself.

An essential factor, if not the chief one, in any scheme for the regeneration of the stage lies in *the training of the actor.* The more closely I am associated with the dramatic profession the more certain am I that all that is needed is radical and adequate training of voice and body.

Perfect the actor's tools, his voice and body, and we shall again have great acting.

April 1927.
March 1930.

CONCLUSION

IN the foregoing pages I have endeavoured to show that the spirit which made the actor of former days is still with us, and that the barriers to its expression are removable.

In discussing them criticism has necessarily bulked large, and criticism insufficiently tempered by praise is apt to appear harsh, acerb even.

So I wish to place on record my appreciation of the whole-hearted enthusiasm and determination displayed by the many members of the dramatic profession whom it has been my privilege and joy to assist in their endeavours to overcome difficulties such as I have discussed in these pages.

And I desire that my concluding words shall be an affirmation of my faith in the genius of our English actors.

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